

RESEARCH

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Mysticism and the Mystical
Consciousness Illustrated
From the Great Religions

By
Joseph Politella

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By
Joseph Politella
Professor of Philosophy

"Beloved, we are God's children now; it does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure."

I John 3:2-3 RSV

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Foreword

The material in this essay has been brought together to lay the foundation for a larger work concerned with the mysticism of the major world religions. It is a study of the detailed steps by which the inward life unfolds. Its purpose is to show in what way the approach to the spiritual life and union with the Highest Being which is the avowed object of the great religions is grounded in laws which can be discovered and experimented with, and except for the distinct hues cast upon them by the mystics and religious brought up in different cultural traditions, show the same milestones and chart the same territory. In some cases, there is direct and literary connection between the mystics of the east and the west; most often what is to be marvelled at is the "geographical" uniformity of the path they travel and the course they chart, where there has been no connection either in time or in space. It is perhaps striking evidence of the truth so often found in the various scriptures, that the ways to God are many, but the goal is one. "In whatever way men approach me," says the Lord in the Hindu *Bhagavad-Gita*, "in that way I love them."

The author desires to acknowledge gratefully, the help of the chairman and the members of the research committee and their aid in making possible the publication of this essay.

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I.

What Mysticism Is: Misconceptions and Clarifications

God, the omnipresent and omnipotent, is not limited by any one creed, for He says (Kor. 2. 109), "Wheresoever ye turn, there is the face of Allah."¹

Nothing is more individual to each soul than the form of its intimacy with our Lord. Abbé de Tourville.²

In spite of all that has been written about the world of the spirit by the seers and saints who have communed with it, as well as by sympathetic critics who have sought to systematize the communications and the nature of the experiences, mysticism and the mystical life are still a stumbling block to some and foolishness to others.

The years since World War II have seen a steady revival of interest in mysticism and the contemplative life, and along with it a more tolerant feeling toward experiences which transcend the "normal" consciousness, but for all that, anything having to do with mysticism conveys to the ordinary reader something whose truth is suspect, something vague, mystifying and irrational—more than likely, a form of magic imported from the Orient. Dean Inge once wrote that no other English word was more loosely used than "mysticism." "Sometimes," he added, "it is used as an equivalent for symbolism or allegorism, sometimes for theosophy or occult science; and sometimes it merely suggests the mental state of a dreamer, or vague and fantastic opinions about God and the world. In Roman Catholic writers 'mystical phenomena' mean supernatural suspensions of physical law . . ."³ For lack of a more suitable designation, Hitler was called a mystic; Stalin's sphinx-like inscrutability was styled mystical; and present-day critics and historians have multiplied uncertainty by applying the label to anyone who tries to free the emotional and affective life of men from any kind of sensible restraint. In our time, an elemental groaning, especially if it induces any kind of audience panic, is quickly styled "mystical," and the irrational rhymes or tunes of the so-called "beat generation" call forth no better term to describe them. Evelyn Underhill, one of the foremost English writers on the subject, warned her readers that mysticism was not irrational but super-rational,⁴ but such warnings have generally fallen on deaf ears. Why should there be such persistent confusion?

¹ Ibn Al-Arabi (d. A.D. 1240), quoted in R. A. Nicholson's *The Mystics of Islam*, London, G. Bell and Sons, 1914, p. 88.

² *Letters of Direction*, Thoughts on the Spiritual Life from the Letters of the Abbé de Tourville. No translator given. Westminster, Dacre Press, 1939, p. 38.

³ William R. Inge, *Christian Mysticism*, London, Methuen and Co., Ltd., 8th edition, 1948, p. 3.

⁴ See Evelyn Underhill's works, *passim*, but especially her *Mysticism*, London Methuen and Co., seventh ed., 1918, pp. 122-123.

One reason for the befuddled meaning of the word may well be due to the fact that the mystical experience transcends the understanding of the non-mystical mind to such an extent that to bring spiritual truths to its grasp is like squashing a sphere onto a flat surface to accommodate a three-dimensional reality to the views of a two-dimensional intelligence. Distortions are thus not recognized; and what seems is taken for what is real. Another basis for misunderstanding may be that temperamentally, there is a type of individual who is suspicious of any claim to a knowledge or experience which is beyond his ken and who insists that his own limited apprehension is the only test of what can and cannot exist. It is the sophist Protagoras come to life again, insisting that the natural man is the measure of all things—"of things that are that they are; and of things that are not, that they are not." A third explanation may be that spiritual mysteries, like the wind which bloweth where it listeth, accommodate themselves to the forms provided by the receiving consciousness, and it takes perspicacity to discern that while the experience is one and the same, the forms in which it is experienced are many and varied. "The color of the water," said Junayd, the Sufi, "is the color of the jar containing the water."⁵

The word mystic came into the English language primarily by way of the neo-Platonists, who popularized the technical terms of the Greek Mysteries. In the Mysteries a *mustes* was one who had undergone initiation and instruction into a knowledge of Divine things about which he was to keep his mouth closed (*muein*). An equally plausible explanation is that the knowledge which the mystic has would be such as would come only when the senses were closed and the energies were occupied with inward things — "apprehending spiritual things spiritually." At any rate, both Plotinus and Proclus emphasize that meaning of the word, and the general usage during the Hellenistic period identifies it with "initiation" into a new life. The terminology, to say nothing of the states of consciousness of which it is descriptive, passed from the Alexandrian Platonists into the teachings of the Christian Church. The gradations of the "ascent" of the soul or its penetration into the life of the spirit were from *katharsis* (purification) to *muesis* (a revelation or unveiling) and from this to *epopteia* (contemplation or communion).⁶ Of the terminology, "mystic" and "mysticism" have survived for general use and designate the preliminary purification, the interior revelations and the higher spiritual states as well.

Students of other religions have noted that factors associated with mysticism are to be found in a very highly developed state in the early religious doctrines of the East: in Vedic literature, in Indian and Chinese and Japanese Buddhism, in Islamic Sufism, and in Judaism as well. The universality is well attested by a noted Orientalist:

⁵ Quoted by Nicholson, op. cit., p. 88.

⁶ See Appendix B in Dean Inge's text, pp. 354-5, "The Greek Mysteries and Christian Mysticism."

There is hardly any soil, be it ever so barren, where Mysticism will not strike root; hardly any creed, however formal, round which it will not twine itself Wonderfully uniform, too, is its tenor: in all ages, in all countries, in all creeds, whether it come from the Brahmin sage, the Persian poet, or the Christian Quietist, it is an enunciation more or less clear, more or less eloquent, of the aspiration of the soul to cease altogether from self and to be at one with God.⁷

Definitions offered by well-known writers on the subject will help to show how extensive are the claims made for mysticism, and also how fundamentally similar are the ends.

Religious Mysticism may be defined as the attempt to realise the presence of the living God in the soul and in nature, or, more generally, *the attempt to realise in thought and in feeling, the immanence of the temporal in the eternal, and of the eternal in the temporal.*

Dean Inge, *Christian Mysticism*, p. 5

(Mysticism) is an attitude of mind; an innate tendency of the human soul, which seeks to transcend reason and to attain to a direct experience of God, and which believes that it is possible for the human soul to be united with Ultimate Reality, when "God ceases to be an object and becomes an experience."

Margaret Smith, *An Introduction to the History of Mysticism*, p. 3

Mysticism is the art of union with Reality. The mystic is a person who has attained that union in greater or less degree; or who aims at and believes in such attainment.

Evelyn Underhill, *Practical Mysticism*, p. 3

The definitions available for evaluation are many and varied. In an appendix to his *Christian Mysticism*, Dean Inge has gathered 26 from a number of scholars, literary men and theologians. Some of the descriptions of mystical experience rationalize it away, some assign it a theological position, some ridicule it. Both William James⁸ and James H. Leuba⁹ have written excellent psychological analyses of the nature of the mystical consciousness, and as psychologists have confined themselves to describing the attendant conditions, rather than the thing itself.

To define is to pinpoint and set limits. In books written by Orientals, it is difficult to find definitions of mysticism as such,—primarily because what it stands for is swallowed up in something greater: the science and art of union with the Divine. In Hinduism, this is called Yoga, a discipline adapted to all sorts and temperaments of men.¹⁰

⁷ E. G. Browne, *A Year Among the Persians*, quoted by Margaret Smith, *An Introduction to the History of Mysticism*, London, S.P.C.K., 1930, p. 2.

⁸ *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, The Gifford Lectures for 1901-2, London, Longmans, Green and Co., 1903, chs. xvi, xvii and passim.

⁹ James H. Leuba, *The Psychology of Religious Mysticism*, N.Y. Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1929.

¹⁰ Of recent interest and in connection with Christian teaching on the "integration of life" as well as the hesychast achievements of the monks of the Orthodox Eastern Church, see Dom J.-M. Déchanet, O.S.B., *Christian Yoga*. London, Burns and Oates, 1960.

The essence of Yoga philosophy, as of all mystic teaching, is the insistence on the possibility of coming into direct contact with the divine consciousness by raising the human to a plane above its normal level.

S. Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy*, I, p. 3

Yoga, thus, not only sets the end in view, but also prescribes the step by step advance through the successive stages of interior growth. Buddhism, too, lacks a precise equivalent. In some cases *Prajna*, "the transcendental science" or "the science of spiritual enlightenment"¹¹ seems close, yet not altogether satisfactory. In Mahayana Buddhism, *Mahaprajnaparamita* is "the great wisdom to reach the opposite shore" of the sea of existence. *Dhyana* comes closer, but for all practical purposes, it is not an equivalent, and one writer reaches the conclusion that it is "perhaps impossible to find a common denominator for these radically different historical phenomena."¹² The stages of the mystical ascent have some kinship with the steps of the "Way," *tariqah*, in Sufism, though many writers notice the points of variance rather than the common truths. In this as in other religions, there must come first the purification of the heart, then a sinking of the heart in the recollection of God, but the end of it is complete absorption (*fana*) in God.¹³ In Chinese religious thought as well, a single word-equivalent to mysticism is not to be found because spiritual progress involves certain distinctive features which cannot be lumped together. Here *chung* (an ideal act, a golden mean of conduct), *cheng* (sincerity, truthfulness) and *shu* (compassion, involvement in one's fellows) are needed to bring about a life which is true and deep and reflective of reality. As the *Chung Yung* says, "Progress from perfection to enlightenment is called spiritual culture. He who is his true self has thereby understanding, and he who has understanding, finds thereby his true self."¹⁴

How can one do justice, within brief compass, to the meaning of mysticism? Any understanding of what is involved must account for these factors:

- a. that it involves a *process of inner growth* where the "natural man is put to death and the "spiritual man" is brought to life,—or where illusion is progressively sloughed off and only the real remains;
- b. that the stages of the inward growth are clearly marked and the advancement on the path can be described with definiteness because human nature is one and its transformation is subject to the operation of definite laws;
- c. that whether the advancement be along lines of the intelligence, the heart or the will depends on the temperament of the mystic; and

¹¹ *The Sutra of Wei Lang*, trans. from the Chinese by Wong Mou-Lam. London, Luzac and Co., 1944, ch. II, p. 27. See also Note 8.

¹² Har Dayal, *The Bodhisattva Doctrine in Buddhist Sanskrit Literature*, London, Kegan Paul Truebner, Trench and Co., Ltd. 1932, p. 236.

¹³ W. Montgomery Watt, *The Faith and Practice of Al-Ghazali*, London, George Allen and Unwin, 1953, p. 60-61.

¹⁴ *Chung Yung*, the Doctrine of the Mean, Bk. II. ch. 21. See Lin Yutang, *The Wisdom of Confucius*, New York, Random House, Inc., 1938, Modern Library Edition, p. 123.

d. that the common goal of the mystics, when allowance has been made for difference of race and culture and temperament and achievement, is one and the same—personal, full, conscious communication, while still on earth, with God, or with a Spiritual Intelligence which, depending on their creed, they may or may not call God.

As distinct from the priest, the ritualistic worshipper and the merely righteous man of each religion, *the mystic is one who strives to reach conscious personal communication with a Higher Intelligence in the universe, and to receive assurance, advice and assistance from It, not only in spiritual matters, but in the practical affairs of life as well.* Gerson is reported to teach that "it is an *experimental* knowledge of God born of unitive love,"¹⁵ but more than this, it represents a life which while rooted above bears practical fruit, "a communion with God, a calm and deep enthusiasm, a love which radiates, a force which acts, a happiness which overflows."¹⁶

¹⁵ Abbé P. Lejeune, *An Introduction to the Mystical Life*, London, R. and T. Washbourne, Ltd., 1915, p. 3.

¹⁶ Henri F. Amiel, *Intimate Journal*, entry for July 16, 1848.

II.

What Mysticism Presupposes About the True Nature of Man

The Wisdom of Enlightenment is inherent in every one of us. It is because of the delusion under which our mind works that we fail to realise it ourselves, and that we have to seek the advice and guidance of enlightened ones before we can know our own Essence of Mind. You should know that so far as Buddha-nature is concerned, there is no difference between an enlightened man and an ignorant one. What makes the difference is that one realises it, while the other is ignorant of it.

Sutra of Wei Lang, ch. ii.

Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? The words that I speak unto you I speak not from myself: but the Father, abiding in me doeth his works.

Gospel according to St. John, 14:10

Writers on the subject remind us¹ that men and women in every religion turn to some form of mysticism when they discover that institutionalized worship does but turn in a weary treadmill that brings no release from the worries of life, nor joy in the resignation to an invisible Divine will. As the Divine is only worshipped and liturgically glorified, it becomes increasingly transcendent in the mind of the worshipper, and no realization is possible of the prayer of the Christ preserved by the Johannine mystic: "as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they may be one in us." (John 17:21)

The primary evidence of the truths of the spirit, as the saints and seers remind us, requires the direct experience of them. The statements of others are always second-hand, and a great gulf is fixed between the religion of authority and the religion of the spirit. As George Fox thundered in the church at Ulverston: "You will say, Christ saith this and the apostles say this; but what canst *thou* say? Art thou a child of Light, and hast thou walked in the Light, and what thou speakest, is it inwardly from God?"² Spiritual things are spiritually discerned, and while the guidance of an enlightened man who has advanced on the path is always welcomed and to be respected, this opening of the inner life must be first-hand and intensely personal. There are degrees of knowledge and advancement, of course, but in any case, the wisdom of enlightenment is to be sought within and directly. St. Paul could speak of traveling, as a woman does in childbirth, to make his Galatian converts conscious of the Christ in their hearts, so that they could say, as he, "it pleased God . . . to reveal (or unveil) His Son within me." (Gal. 4:19 and 1:15-16). The perfection of life, said Père de Caussade, "is to form Jesus Christ in the depths of our hearts."³

¹ See among others, Dean Inge, *op. cit.*, pp. 5 and 22.

² See the entry in *George Fox' Journal* for 1652.

³ J. P. DeCaussade, *S. J. Self-Abandonment to Divine Providence*, London, Burns and Oates, 1933, p. xv.

There is a marked contrast between the theological view of the nature of man and the outlook of mysticism. Scriptural religion presumes that at some time "in the beginning," and in a sort of anthropomorphic way, God "made" man. In the Hebrew book of Genesis, "The Lord God formed man out of the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life" (2:7). In the Holy Qur'an, we learn that Allah created man "out of mire" and breathed His spirit into him (38:72), or made him from dust and a little fluid (35:11). Theologically, man is made in the image and likeness of God, though "a little less than divine," as Moffat translates Psalm 8:5. Man, being "made" or "created" by God, can rise no higher than his source—to the beatific *vision* of God.

What distinguishes the mystical view is a more inclusive premise. Man, essential man, is not "made" or "created," though his bodies, physical and psychical, may be spoken of that way. In essence man *is* God. In essence he is one with the Oversoul, not fragmented or detached from It. His Christ-nature is one with the Infinite. In a chapter of her life, St. Catherine of Genoa throws theology and orthodoxy aside and cries exultantly, "My *me* is God, nor do I know myself save in Him!" She adds, "My Being is God, not by simple participation, but by a true transformation of my Being."⁴ God's Spirit bears witness with our spirit that they are of the same essence. God and man *seem* to mortal understanding to be separate and distinct, only resembling each other, but in reality they are one, or rather, *only God is*.

Ye who are searchers for God, ye *are* God!

Need there is none for the search; ye are It, ye are It!

. . . . Ye are essence, ye are qualities, the throne of heaven, the carpet of being

Jellal'udin Rumi: *Masnavi*⁵

In more familiar philosophic terms, man is a microcosmic God. As a microcosm, he is and has all Divinity in a potential way. "The universe in its entirety," says Dr. Suzuki, "is an infinite mind, and our finite mind, with its transmarginal consciousness, is a microcosm the human mind is in communion with the heart of the universe."⁶ John Scotus Erigena, the ninth century Irish monk, following the Alexandrian Platonists and the teachings of the Dionysius, whose work he translated, said that God created the world and man not out of nothing, but out of himself.⁷ "As above, so below," reads the aphorism in the Emerald Tablet attributed to the Egyptian sage Hermes Trismegistus.⁸ For the mediaeval Christian mystics, especially those of the school of the Abbey of St. Victor⁹ and the Rhineland group, the way to ascend to God is to descend into the self. "If thou wishest to search out the deep

⁴ St. Catherine of Genoa, *Vita e Dottrina*, cap. xv., quoted by Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism*, 3rd ed. 1911, p. 151, 153.

⁵ Translated by "Zahid" in an article in "Lucifer", No. 80, p. 148.

⁶ D. T. Suzuki, *Outlines of Mahayana Buddhism*, 1907, p. 122.

⁷ Inge, *Christian Mysticism*, p. 136.

⁸ *Quod superius sicut quod inferius*. Quoted by Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism*, p. 191.

⁹ See Inge, pp. 141-2.

things of God," says Richard of St. Victor, "search out the depths of thine own spirit." Jacob Boehme voices the same truth: "Whatsoever God is in His Nature, the spirit of man is in itself."¹⁰ In this respect, the East and the West, ancient and modern, speak the same sentiments.

Verily, he who has seen, heard, comprehended and known the Self,
by him is this entire universe known.

Bṛihad-Araṇyaka Upaniṣhad, ii.4-5

What that subtle Being is, of which this whole universe is composed,
that is the Real, that is the Soul, *That Art Thou*, O Shvetaketu!

Chandogya Upaniṣhad, vi.14.3

In a spirit which is often misconstrued as pantheistic, or as a form of "nature-mysticism," the religious mystic finds the Eternal everywhere and in everything. Each thing reflects God according to its nature,—some things more, some less; yet there is the accompanying deeper truth that the only *real* is God, all else is illusion. Says Jami, the Sufi:

Each speck of matter did He constitute
A mirror, causing each one to reflect
The beauty of His visage . . .
Where'er thou see'st a veil,
Beneath that veil He hides.¹¹

All things are veils, illusory and Mayavic, and yet revealing and making known that which they hide. Man is a veil considered outwardly, a mirror of the cosmos. Within, the spirit of man is the candle of the Lord; it is the Divine essence. This Vedantin spirit is evident to such an extent in the letters of St. Paul that Sir William Ramsay has cause to observe that the one great Pauline principle is, "Only the Divine is real, all else is error."¹² Our life, the great Apostle told his converts at Colossae, "is hid with Christ in God" (3:3) and it is only because of the vanity or inversion of our vision that men have become "alienated from the life of God." (Ephesians 4:18).

Union with God, thus, is not only possible, but it is our ultimate aim and only reality. God is indeed "not far away from any of us"; nearer, as the Prophet of Islam said, than our jugular vein.¹³ If this is granted, it is easy to understand why so many of the mystics should exhort us to sink into the depths of our own natures to find the supreme Reality. St. Catherine of Siena heard the inner Voice say:

If thou wilt arrive at a perfect knowledge and enjoyment of Me,
the Eternal Truth, thou shouldst never go outside of thyself; and
by humbling thyself in the valley of humility, thou wilt know Me
and thyself, from which thou wilt draw all that is necessary . . .
In self-knowledge, then, thou wilt humble thyself; seeing that in
thyself thou dost not even exist.¹⁴

¹⁰ Jacob Boehme, *The Threefold Life of Man*, cap. V, par. 90.

¹¹ From the translation of E. G. Browne. Quoted by Margaret Smith, *The Sufi Path of Love*, An anthology of Sufism. London, Luzac and Co., 1954, p. 52.

¹² *The Cities of St. Paul: Their Influence on His Life and Thought*, London, 1907, p. 12.

¹³ *Qur'an*, 50:15. Also translated "nearer than the neck-artery." See R. A. Nicholson, *Rumi, Poet and Mystic*, London, Allen and Unwin, 1950, p. 73n.

¹⁴ *The Dialogue of the Seraphic Virgin, Catherine of Siena*, tr. by Algar Thorold, N. Y., Benziger Brothers, 1925, ch. iv. p. 6.

Mysticism, whether Indian, Taoist, Sufi, or Christian, presumes a fundamental identity of the soul of man with the Oversoul, of the spirit with God, of the lover with the Beloved. Man's life on earth, his existence, is an estrangement, or, in a different sense, an exile from which the remembrance of his true home is not altogether lost. More than any other man, the mystic is sensitively aware of his Divine heredity, of his roaming in the labyrinth of matter, and of how all his efforts must be directed to the return home. The return is only self-realization. To know who one is, is to discover one's identity with God. Shankaracharya phrases it this way:

When the sick rightly uses medicine he is restored to health, but not through the right actions of another.

The true being of the Real must be seen through one's own eyes illumined by clear wisdom; it is not enough that thy Teacher should see.

... only through awaking to the oneness of one's true Self with the Eternal does liberation come and in no other way.¹⁵

¹⁵ *The Crest Jewel of Wisdom* (Vivekachudamani), attributed to Shankara Acharya, translated by Charles Johnston, N.Y. 1925, par. 55, 56, 58.

III.

The Spiritual Consciousness and the Psychic Consciousness

When the perfect man employs his mind, it is like a mirror. It conducts nothing and it anticipates nothing: it responds to what is before it, but does not retain it. Thus he is able to deal successfully with all things, and injures none For mind is like a mirror, it gathers dust as it reflects. It needs the gentle breezes of Soul-wisdom to brush off the dust of our illusions. Seek, O beginner, to blend thy mind and Soul.

Chuang-tze¹

Union, spiritual consciousness, is gained through control of the versatile psychic nature²

The barriers to interior consciousness which drive the psychic nature this way and that, are these: sickness, inertia, doubt, lightmindedness, laziness, intemperance, false notions, inability to reach a stage of meditation, or to hold it when reached.

Yoga Sūtras of Patanjali, Bk. I, 2, 30.³

An examination of the descriptions of their experiences left behind by the great mystics, makes it evident that in the higher stages of contemplation what is referred to as Reality, the Lord, or the Beloved, is seen face-to-face, in pure vision and without veils or hindrances. It is the pure in heart who see God; impurity mars the vision. The Dutch contemplative, Jan of Ruysbroeck thus describes the elevation to the Spirit:

For what we are, that we intently contemplate, and what we contemplate that we are; for our mind, our life and our essence are simply lifted up and united to the very truth, which is God. Wherefore, in this simple and intent contemplation we are one life and one spirit with God. And this I call the contemplative life. In this stage, the soul is united with God without means; it sinks into the vast darkness of the Godhead.⁴

Spiritual truths are only apprehended by the spiritual consciousness of man, and the only true knowledge, when all is said and done, is knowledge of the Self. In a way that blends the highest visions of the Eastern and Western mystics, al-Ghazali, the Muslim Sufi, enjoins us to know ourselves as "we really are," in order that we may understand our true nature and for what purposes we were brought into the world. Within

¹ From the Writings of Kwang-Tze, Bk. VII, Part I, Sec. 7. *Sacred Books of the East*, vol. xxxix, p. 266.

² The "psychic nature" is *chitta*, which Ernest Wood speaks of as "the lower mind" or "mirror in which we receive and see all the pieces of sensation that come to us through the organs of knowledge." See Woods' *Yoga Dictionary*, N. Y. Philosophical Library, 1956, s.v. J. H. Woods translates this verse as "Yoga is the restriction of the fluctuation of the mind-stuff."

³ Charles Johnston, *The Yoga Sūtras of Patanjali*, "The Book of the Spiritual Man," An Interpretation. New York, 1912.

⁴ Ruysbroeck, "The Sparkling Stone", 43 in *The Adornment of the Spiritual Marriage* translated by C. A. Wynschenk Dom. London, John M. Watkins, 1951, pp. 203-4.

us, he adds, are combined the qualities of beasts and angels, but the spirit is the real essence, and besides it, nothing else is real. So, strive for the knowledge of your origin, says al-Ghazali, “. . . that you may know how to attain to the Divine Presence and the contemplation of the Divine Majesty and Beauty”⁵

Among the greater mystics, the true Lover is also the true Gnostic. He has attained knowledge of the real Self and in that sense he walks with God, as did Abraham and Moses and Enoch, and knows Him face to face. “My saint,” said the Lord to David, according to Islamic tradition,⁶ “hears by Me and sees by Me.” “If a man love me,” said Jesus to one of his followers, “he will keep my words: and my Father will love him and we will come unto him and make our abode with him.” (John 14:23) The Buddha, too, claimed to know the Eternal face to face and to enter into It and return from It as one of the seers who has let go every desire that is in the heart. In the Buddhist *Tevigga Sutta*, or “On Knowledge of the Vedas,” there is this record:

To the Tathagata (Buddha) when asked the path which leads to the world of Brahma, there can be neither doubt nor difficulty. For Brahma I know, Vesettha, and the world of Brahma, and the path which leadeth unto it. Yea, I know it even as one who has entered the Brahma world, and has been born with it!⁷

This consciousness of spiritual things both the early Christian mystics and the Sufis term the “true gnosis.” It is a state attained when the spirit in man transcends or “abandons” the thought-images of this world and of the states beyond it and is able to live in contemplation of the Lord. “It is to be intoxicated,” says al-Ghazali, “by the wine of Love, and not to recover therefrom except in the Vision of the Beloved, for the gnostic dwells in the light of his Lord”⁸ He adds that this gnosis (*ma'rifa*) is the gift of God, a light which he casts into the heart. “It is that which is attained without meditation between the soul and its Creator . . . a ray from the Lamp of the Invisible” shed upon a heart which is pure and spiritualized. A lesser-known Sufi, Hujwiri, offers the commentary that “the worth of everyone is in proportion to gnosis, and he who is without gnosis is worth nothing.”⁹ This gnosis is beyond the “knowledge” of the learned. In fact, the mystics all emphasize that the knowledge of the mind—analytical, building up syllogisms, revolving around premises and conclusions—not only does not aid in the attainment of the spiritual consciousness, but is in fact a positive detriment in the development of the spiritual life. Juliana of Norwich, the fourteenth century English anchoress, exclaimed that it was by love that the Lord was to be gotten and known, but by the lower mental faculties, never. In the same spirit, Patanjali, the Hindu

⁵ *Al-Ghazali the Mystic*, by Margaret Smith, London, Luzac and Co., 1944, p. 151.

⁶ *Ibid* p. 194.

⁷ I. 43. *Sacred Books of the East*, vol. XI, p. 186.

⁸ Al-Ghazali, *Mukashafat al-Qulub*, quoted by Margaret Smith, op. cit., p. 185.

⁹ *Ibid*, p. 185, note 2.

master of the science of Yoga, speaks of "unsound intellection" and the "prediction carried on through words and thoughts" as being hindrances to union with the Self.¹⁰

The Sufis say that the gnostics differ in the degree of the gnosis to which they attain, since the Gnosis is a shoreless sea whose depths cannot be fathomed. Al-Ghazali observes that God is obscured by Seventy Thousand Veils of Light and Darkness, and these veils vary according to the different natures of those veiled from the One Reality. It follows, understandably, that the purpose of the mystic is to set the soul free from its fetters, to polish the mirror, and "so to remove the veils between the soul and God that it may be able to return to its true home."¹¹ Thus does al-Ghazali pray for one of his disciples: "May God decree for you the search for the highest bliss; may He prepare for you the ascent to the highest height; may He anoint your inward vision with the light of Reality; may He empty your inmost self from all save His own Presence."¹² In the body man's vision is obscured and he follows false lights. St. Paul observed that here we see through a glass darkly, but when we have pure vision, we shall see directly and face to face.

How does it happen that man's vision of God is obscured and distorted and veiled? That it is unclear is not only the contention of the Sufi mystics and the Hindu sages, but also of the great Christian saints. By way of trying to make clear the relation of the spiritual consciousness and what an earlier generation spoke of as the "psychic" consciousness, one may fall back on one of the short treatises attributed to Shankaracharya, the South Indian sage, entitled *Vaṇḍya Sudha* or "Definition of One's Own Self."¹³ The treatise refers to the three worlds in which man's activity is carried out as "the ordinary world," "the looking glass world," and "the transcendent world." In the last, man's being and activity are one with the Eternal. The analogy brings to mind St. Paul's division of man into *body*, *soul* and *spirit*, and his description of the consciousness from the terrestrial through the psychical to the spiritual as he explained it in the fifteenth chapter of the first letter to his disciples at Corinth.

The body is sown perishable, it rises imperishable it is sown in weakness, it rises in power; it is sown an animal body (*soma psychikon*), it is raised a spiritual body It is not the spiritual that comes first, but the animal (*to psychikon*), then the spiritual. The first man is a man of earth, of dust; the second man is from heaven. What the man of dust is, that also are those who are of dust; and what the heavenly One is, that also are those who are heavenly. As we have worn the likeness of the man of dust, let us also wear the likeness of the heavenly One.

I Cor. 15:42-49, Weymouth's translation

¹⁰ *The Yoga Sūtras of Patanjali*, The Book of the Spiritual Man, translated by Charles Johnston, Bk. I, 8, 9. London, John M. Watkins, 1954.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 149.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 149-50.

¹³ See, for example "The Century of Verses", 53 and 60 in *Select Works of Sri Sankaracharya*, trans. by S. Venkataramanan. Madras, G. A. Natesan and Co., n.d.

The "psychical man"—a more meaningful translation of *to psychikon* than "animal body"—wears the likeness of the man of dust, i.e. the physical body and its animating powers. As we have worn the likeness of the matter-centered man, let us transfer our energies to identify ourselves with the heaven-centered man. St. Paul's description of the three planes of human action bears a startling resemblance to the idea of the Sanskrit text of Shankaracharya the ordinary man, the looking-glass man and the transcendent man. Since our concern, at the moment, is the psychical consciousness, let us examine the nature of its activities. Why, in relation to the material world and the spiritual world is its sphere described as a "looking glass world" which bears an image both of the earthly and the heavenly?

The texts attributed to the great Shankaracharya have frequent reference to this looking-glass world.¹³ The psychical consciousness reflects in itself both the world which is below it (the material) and the world which is above it (the transcendent or the spiritual). Like a looking-glass, it reverses, and in the nature of reality, perverts, what it reflects. Some Platonists have regarded material world as the source of life's illusions, and the knowledge of it as a shadow-knowledge.¹⁴ Among the mystics, a distinction has been made between the knowledge from above and the knowledge from beneath.

We may think of the ordinary man of our threefold division, the "terrestrial" man as St. Paul calls him, as using the energies and perceptions of the physical body, but using them without being conscious that he is conscious. This "natural man" (again St. Paul's phrase) has direct consciousness, but no true self-consciousness. He has eyes to see and ears to hear, but he does not truly see and hear; he does not reflect. The consciousness of the true self is simply not there. How is he to be led to this true self-consciousness? How is he to be led to reflect? In the explanations provided by such teachers as Shankara—and Patanjali before him—it would seem as if the universe has provided the looking-glass world exactly for this purpose. "All life is but the mirror wherein the soul learns to know its own face."¹⁵

In our ordinary experience, the physical world acts in this way: as we look at a tree, two things happen. First, we see the tree outside of us, growing in the earth; then we see the tree in our minds. We form a picture, a mind-image of the tree. So there are two trees: the material tree and the psychical tree. We carry the psychical tree around with us when we leave the ordinary tree behind. Shankaracharya compares the mind image to a picture painted on canvas. We carry the picture with us wherever we go.

¹⁴ The basis for this is in Plato's allegory of the Cave at the beginning of the 7th book of the *Republic*. See also Plotinus, *Enneads*, V,v,10 and I,viii,3.

¹⁵ Charles Johnston's commentary on *The Yoga Sūtras of Patanjali*, II. 23. See his translation of this work.

If we were without desires and passions and appetites, if we were without covetousness and the strong sense of wishing to convert all things into our possession, we might gather a multitude of pictures and so enrich our memories. But in his present "fallen" state, plunged into illusion, man is not free from appetites and desires, and these desires warp his knowledge of natural things. It is very likely that the early races, like uncorrupted animals, ate to live. They used their senses of taste and smell to distinguish between things wholesome and unwholesome; and, when they had eaten enough, they forgot all about food. The gourmand, in our time, as he eats, rests his consciousness upon the rich flavor of his food, presses each delicate morsel against his tongue, and gives the food his complete attention. The activity of the looking-glass world now comes in. The highly energized image of the appealing flavor is reflected in the psychical world, and even after the physical food has been withdrawn, he can taste it and retaste it anew. In this way, through the operation of the looking-glass world in which he is immersed, the psychical man heaps upon himself dynamic images of the things perceived by his senses. In St. Paul's words, he makes himself in the image of the earthly, for we grow in the likeness of our desires. "Man, verily, is formed of desire, as his desire is, so is his will; as his will is, so he works; and whatever work he does, in the likeness of that he grows,"¹⁶ says the Upanishad.

Whether the desire be for things physical or psychical, the consciousness of the looking-glass man is colored and transformed. The natural man makes pictures of himself in his mind, tastes how admirably well he does certain things and makes pictures of how other men, in his condition of consciousness, do the same thing. Comparison, whether in the evolution of the race or the growth of the child, soon leads to emulation, jealousy, the ambition to outdo others. Each man, contemplating himself in his own looking glass, becomes enslaved by the laws characteristic of looking glasses. He loses himself in self-admiration and vanity. Vanity causes alienation and estrangement from God. Henceforth, St. Paul warned his followers in Ephesus, "you must give up living like pagans; for their purposes are futile, their intelligence is darkened, they are estranged from the life of God by the ignorance which their dullness of heart has produced in them—men who have recklessly abandoned themselves to sensuality, with a lust for the business of impurity in every shape and form." He enjoins them forcefully, to "lay aside the old nature which belonged to your former course of life . . . and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, putting on the new nature, that divine pattern which has been created in the upright and pious character of the Truth." (4:18-24, Moffat's translation) This "estrangement from the life of God" is the greatest sin, according to the mystics. *The Cloud of Unknowing* speaks of "sin" as a lump—"the lump of self."¹⁷

¹⁶ *Bṛihad Aranyaka Upanishad*, IV. 4.5.

¹⁷ Bk. II. 5.

An understanding of the nature of the psychic self sets the stage for our knowledge of the "mystic" who reflects not the pure light of the Spirit but the light refracted through his own chinks and crannies. "Among the Sufis," a traveler once observed, "we find deep souls, magnificent enthusiasts, fantastic dreamers, sensual poets, many fools, and many rogues."¹⁸ The same might be said of the mystics of other lands. In general, the superficial observer is unable to distinguish between the wisdom from above and the wisdom from beneath, and the great writers on the art of spiritual indrawal warn us of the many distortions which can deceive us. Patanjali speaks of the vaccillations of *chitta*, the "mind-stuff" which is well-described by the term "psychic" and also well interpreted by St. James when in moral terms he condemns it as "earthly, unspiritual (*psychike*) and devilish." (3:15) All too often vanity and pride are mistaken for realization and advanced degrees of growth. A perverse spirit, surely, made Sheikh Husain Mansur Hallaj (A.D. 919) go about the streets shouting frantically, "I am God! I am God!" until he was executed with fearful tortures by the populace.¹⁹ Among the Quakers, James Naylor, inspired by the same vanity, came to an untimely end.²⁰ William Blake, of whom both Wordsworth and Southey expressed the view that he was a "great but undoubtedly insane genius" rose to great heights of inspiration, but was often involved in a psychic whirl where he lost his sanity. In one of those moments he could write to his art patron, Mr. Flaxman: "I am more famed in heaven for my works than I could well conceive. In my brain are studies and chambers filled with books and pictures of old, which I wrote and painted in ages of eternity before my mortal life; and those works are the delight and study of the archangels."²¹

A study of the chapter of "The Sick Soul" in William James' *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, or the material on "Mysticism and Magic" in Evelyn Underhill's *Mysticism*, to say nothing of more strictly psychological studies of the mystic states, is convincing evidence that very often, when the consciousness is raised to a state where it is capable of receiving impressions or communications from Spiritual Intelligences, there are frequently created unstable physical and mental conditions. The austerities commonly practiced, such as prolonged fasting, contemplation and prayer, and the various ascetic disciplines, all tend to disturb the nervous equilibrium. Quite often, then, the effect of such practices and the proximity of the higher energies, force the normal consciousness to enter new conditions far transcending its customary states. James properly commented that "Our normal, waking, rational consciousness

¹⁸ Quoted by "Member of the Persia Society of London" in his *Selections from the Rubaiyat and Odes of Hafiz*, London, 1920, p. 19.

¹⁹ See Margaret Smith, *Studies in Early Mysticism in the Near and Middle East*. London, Sheldon Press, 1931, p. 235.

²⁰ Letter to John Flaxman, 21 September 1800, in *The Letters of William Blake*, edited by Geoffrey Keynes, N. Y., The MacMillan Co., 1956, p. 51.

²¹ See Howard Brinton, *Friends for 300 Years*, London, George Allen and Unwin, Ltd. 1953, p. 101.

is but one special type of consciousness, whilst all about it, parted from it by the flimsiest screens, lie potential forms of consciousness entirely different.²²

Between the visions of the greater saints and the apocalypses of the seers on the one hand, and the visitations to the psychics on the other, there are distinct lines of demarcation. Generally speaking, the psychic all too often is enmeshed in a conscious state of his own creation, where he superimposes his own notions on what he sees. The true mystic it is said, sees things more truly as they are. The higher the degree of his attainment, the greater the penetration of his powers and insight. He withdraws himself from the world of matter so that he might see things from a transcendent point of view. His views of things are like those that would come to a two-dimensional creature suddenly raised to a three-dimensional view of things.²³ The eleventh book of the *Bhagavad-Gita*, for example, has been regarded by commentators as the record of a Transfiguration. Here Arjuna, as if "in the spirit" or an attenuated state of consciousness wherein he is lifted out of himself beholds "the gods in Thy body, O divine One! and all the hosts of diverse beings; Brahma the Creator seated on the lotus throne, and all the Seers and Serpents of wisdom." "I was in the spirit" is a frequent phrase in the apocalypses both of Ezekiel and St. John the Divine. In an ecstatic state, St. Paul speaks of having been "caught up into paradise and heard unspeakable words." (II Cor. 12:4) The stability of the mystic, or, more accurately, the degree to which he has mastered the ever-shifting mind-stuff, determines the purity of his vision and the integrity of his experience with those things which transcend the normal consciousness.

²² William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, N. Y. Longmans, Green and Co., 1903, p. 388.

²³ See the very suggestive illustrations in Ch. III of P. D. Ouspensky's *Tertium Organum*, "A Key to the Enigmas of the World". N. Y., Alfred A. Knopf, 2nd ed. 1925.

IV.

Mysticism and Magic (White and Black)

We must be careful to distinguish between contemplation or the Mystical Life and the special gifts which accompany it, such as ecstasies, ravishments, and visions, either bodily or imaginary. It is forbidden to desire these gifts and to ask for them, but to strive to reach them would be madness.

Alvarez de Paz, *De Natura Contemplations*, cap. xiii.¹

One of the chief charges against me is that I am a magician. Have I not myself distinguished between two kinds of magic? One, which the Greeks called *goeteia* depends entirely on alliance with evil spirits and deserves to be regarded with horror and punished; the other (*theurgia*) is magic in the proper sense of the word. The former subjects man to the evil spirits, the latter makes them serve him. The former is neither art nor science; the latter embraces the deepest mysteries and the knowledge of Nature with her powers....

From the *Apology of Pico della Mirandola*²

Mysticism is all too often identified with or mistaken for certain practices and powers which the ancient writers connected with the subject of magic,—and magic was once a term of reverence and spiritual distinction. Anciently, the magician was also the holy man, advanced in knowledge and divine wisdom. The root of the word magic is in the Sanskrit *maha*, "great," so that a "mahatma" is literally a great soul or spirit—a man advanced far beyond other men in spiritual knowledge and power as well as one who works to uplift mankind. He is the same as the Buddhist *arabat*, defined as one who is free from all craving and rebirth and who has attained the perfect enlightenment of Nirvana. Our term comes through Persian sources. "The learned men among the Persians who are engaged in the service of the Deity," we are informed by Porphyry, the Platonist, "are called Magi."³ In the *Zend-Avesta*, the ancient Persian scripture, the Magi are divided into three degrees: Herbeds or "novices"; Mobeds or "masters"; and Destur Mobeds or "perfect masters."⁴

Magic and magician are words now degraded to designate pretense, sleight-of-hand, charlatanism and jugglery. In literature, a magician is usually one who has sold his soul to the Evil One; a sorcerer, an enchanter. The term has become a convenient label to include those possessing or pretending to possess such psychic powers as clairvoyance and clairaudience, mediumistic ability, to know the future, one who can levitate, subject others to his will, read thoughts or display any supernatural gift. The "occult," "magic" and "mystic" are often made synonymous, with no attempt made to sift the good from the bad, or the natural from the perverted. Whether the magic be "white" or "black," good or evil, depends on whether it is tainted with selfishness.

¹ Quoted by Abbé P. Lejeune in his *An Introduction to the Mystical Life*, London, R. and T. Washbourne, Ltd., 1915, p. 11.

² Quoted by Dean Inge, *Christian Mysticism*, p. 269n.

³ *De Abstinencia*, IV. 16.

⁴ Bk II, 171, 261.

We learn that no true disciple may sell or make a display of his powers, nor teach them except to those who are morally and mentally prepared by extensive training.

In virtually all the world religions, there are references to the supernatural powers of saints and seers and holy men who have consecrated their lives to spiritual living. In some cases, these powers seem to be "God-given," to arise spontaneously, accompanying spiritual development. In some cases they are cultivated and deliberately sought after. In some cases they are a natural unfoldment, properly controlled and used for right ends. In every case, a shadow attends them—the shadow of vanity, egotism, pride, spiritual and material ambition.

The texts of Hinduism and Buddhism contain very elaborate accounts of the nature of the powers latent in man which develop or ex-foliate under natural or forced conditions of spiritual growth. Patanjali mentions certain Siddhis or Occult Powers which result from perfection in meditation, and it is the possession of any one or several of these Siddhis, in lesser or greater measure, which account for the true powers of the advanced Yogi as well as for the exhibitions of the sadhus of the marketplace. In the Hindu texts there are frequent references to the powers of adepts. Examples of the way in which these are perverted and prostituted by exhibitionists and the misguided may be found enumerated in Professor John C. Oman's *The Mystics, Ascetics and Saints of India*, (1903) as well as in accounts of modern travelers.

By far the most systematic presentation of these Siddhis is to be found in the second and third books of Patanjali's *Yoga Sūtras*. The text of the *Sūtras* and the Bashya or Commentary, list these among others of lesser prominence:

- ii.43 — clairvoyance and clairaudience;
- iii.16 — knowledge of the future;
- iii.18 — knowledge of one's previous births;
- iii.21 — power to become invisible;
- iii.30 — the cessation of hunger and thirst;
- iii.38 — power of hypnotic suggestion—"your mind-stuff enters the body of another";
- iii.42 — power to walk upon water or on a spider's thread or to pass through the air;
- iii.45 — "the power by reason of which fire, hot as it is, burns you not."⁵

In iii.50, there is the interesting verse that "There should be complete overcoming of the allurements of pride in the invitations of the different regions of life, lest attachment to things evil arise once more." By way of clarification, the Commentary adds that disciples, or seekers after union, are of four degrees: those entering the path; those who are in

⁵ See the indicated references, the explanation under "Occult Powers, the Eight" in Ernest Wood's *Yoga Dictionary* (N. Y., 1956) the text with Bashya in volume 17 of the Harvard Oriental Series, translated by J. H. Woods (Cambridge, 1927) and a very illuminating article by Professor Charles Rockwell Lanman entitled "The Hindu Yoga System", in the *Harvard Theological Review*, vol. xi, pp. 355 ff.

the realm of allurements; those who have won the victory over matter and the senses; and lastly, those who stand firm in the spiritual life. The caution, obviously, is addressed to those in the second state.⁶

These same powers are also treated systematically by Buddhagoshā in Books XII and XIII of the *Visuddhi-magga* or "Way of Salvation," and, observes Professor Lanman, "with a quiet gravity, as if no one were expected to have any difficulty in believing them."⁷ In the Pali records, these psychic powers are called the *Iddhis*. We read in the early texts how disciples like Mogallāna and Anuruddha possessed them and of how the Buddha specifically forbade a vain display of these supernormal faculties. The occult powers accompany or are the fruit of the advanced states of the practice of *jhāna* (or *dhyāna* in Mahayana Buddhism)—a state of higher meditation. "In due course," as the *jhāna* states are successively attained, "the *siddhi* powers will open and the science of Magic be available." The Nikāyas of the *Sutta-Pitaka* nowhere describe the *jhāna* process in detail, and the terms for the stages of it belong to the later books; but the wonderful powers of which the Buddha was possessed and which the early disciples were able to make use of in minor degree are well attested to in the literature. Professor W. Norman Brown has brought together a very interesting collection of the Buddhist and early Indian "miracles" of walking on water, the levitation which accompanies it, and other gifts which belong to the powers of the spiritual man.⁸ In the *Dīgha-nikāya* of the Pali Buddhist canon, one of the suttas, perhaps as old as the third century, B.C., there occurs a long description of the attainments which accompany progress in the religious life and result from the practice of meditation. Before arriving at the state of Nibbāna (Nirvana), the adept acquires the Six Supernatural Powers (*iddhis*):

He becomes visible; he becomes invisible.
 He passes through walls and ramparts and mountains . . . as through
 air.
 He darts up through the earth and dives down into the earth as
 though in the water.
 He walks on the water without breaking through, as though on land.
 He travels through the air cross-legged, like a bird on the wing.
 He ascends in the body even to the World of Brahma.⁹

On the basis of his study of the text, the Venerable Thera Prajñānanda believes it safe to say that "all the phenomena known in the West today, such as hypnotism, mediumship, clairvoyance, telepathy, etc., have been known in Buddhist countries for centuries, and not only these powers but many much greater; powers which few can attain, and which belong to the higher evolution of mankind." He adds that "Some of the powers known in the East today, such as invisibility (reflecting etheric

⁶ See J. H. Woods' translation of the text and Bashya in the *Harvard Oriental Series*, vol. 17, pp. 285-6.

⁷ In the article in the *Harvard Theological Review*, cited above, p. 366.

⁸ See his *The Indian and Christian Miracles of Walking on the Water*, Chicago, Open Court Publishing Co., 1928, passim.

⁹ Quoted by Brown, op. cit. p. 15. See further Burlingame's *Buddhist Parables*, p. 252.

currents from the aura), bodily levitation, knowledge of the three times, past, present and future, casting enchantments, etc., are almost unknown to the West, and perhaps this is well, for their possession must bring tremendous responsibility, and their abuse would very quickly produce dire results.¹⁰ It is not difficult to imagine what would happen if these powers were to be attained by a man of criminal character. The possession of the iddhis has never been flaunted before the public and those possessing them have always been warned of spiritual pride in the vain ostentation of them. The Buddha himself enjoined, "An ordained disciple must not boast of any superhuman perfections, be it celestial visions or miracles. The disciple who boasts of a superhuman perfection, be it celestial visions or miracles, is no longer a disciple of the Buddha."¹¹ In the *Dighanikaya* the Buddha is represented as saying: "It is because I see danger in the practice of these mystic wonders that I loathe and abhor and am ashamed thereof."¹²

From the Pali literature it can be easily proved that the Buddha believed that the iddhis could be developed and employed, at the same time that he saw and warned against their wrongful use. The Tantric system of magic frequently practiced in certain parts of Tibet claims Buddhist inspiration and authority even when obviously the most licentious form of the invocations of elemental forces is involved. In the *Saddhanamala*, a Tantric work containing about 312 small works called Sadhanas, we find mention of a fairly large number of mantras or formulas of invocation supposed to have been taught by the Buddha to the lay-brethren who believed in their efficacy.¹³

Dr. Karl Reichelt, the Lutheran missionary to China, points out that in East Asia meditation is often combined with *yoga*, i.e. physical and psychical exercises which aim at bringing certain nerve centers and life-functions under the control of the will. It is referred to as *tso-wang*. He adds that while India is the "homeland of the developed yoga cult," it is now a well-established fact that in China there existed a certain type of yoga several hundred years before the Indian discipline was introduced about 500 A.D. by the celebrated patriarch Bodhidharma. Chuang-tze, about 300 B.C., says there were in his day religious people who practiced breathing exercises in order to attain insight, holiness and longevity,¹⁴ and he adds contemptuously that "These people climb trees like bears to get fresh air." But at the same time that Chuang-tze despises this self-seeking resorting to magical practices, both he and Lieh-tze attribute spiritual powers to the spiritual man or the "realized

¹⁰ The Ven. Thera Prajñānda, "Buddhism and Psychic Powers" in *Buddhism in England*, vol. II, no. 5, Jan.-Feb., 1937, p. 131-132.

¹¹ Paul Carus, *The Gospel of Buddha*, p. 121 quoted in *What is Buddhism*, published by the Buddhist Society, London, 4th ed. 1942, pp. 129-30.

¹² See T. W. Rhys Davids' Pali English Dictionary, p. 121, and a summary of these cases in B. Bhattacharyya, *An Introduction to Buddhist Esotericism*, Oxford University Press, 1932, pp. 18 ff.

¹³ Batthacharya, op. cit. p. 19.

¹⁴ Karl L. Reichelt, *Meditation and Piety in the Far East*, London, Lutterworth Press, 1953, p. 64.

man" (*chen jen* or *cheng jen*). The word for the Taoist sages or "Immortals" is *hsien*, and though it is often the case that the obscurity of the writings of Chuang-tze make it difficult to say when he is censuring and decrying the exhibitionism of the mountebank, and when he is describing the powers of the perfected man, the fact remains that even as in Hinduism and Buddhism, certain psychic and spiritual powers could be cultivated by effort and drugs and as the result of meditation. We read thus:

He who knows the Tao . . . is sure to understand how to regulate his conduct in all varying circumstances. Having that understanding, he will not allow things to injure himself. Fire cannot burn him who is perfect in virtue, nor water drown him; neither cold nor heat can affect him injuriously; neither bird nor beast can hurt him . . . nothing can injure him.¹⁵

There is the story, too, of the sage in the guise of a simple-witted peasant named Shang ch'iu K'ai, who was abused by the followers of an evil and cruel man and later taken to the top of a cliff to be thrown over. But the sage himself was the first to leap over the edge,—and lo! he was wafted down to earth like a bird on the wing, completely unharmed. His tormentors sought to harm him by suggesting that he dive into the bottom of a foaming river to retrieve a non-existent pearl, and when he came out, he held a pearl in his hand. He is made to pass through fire to secure food and costly garments, and he issues from the ordeal with clothes unsoiled and body unsinged.¹⁶ Of Lieh-tze the legend came down that he "could ride on the wings of the wind, and travel where he wished."¹⁷ The Sage has power over animals, and all living things respond to his influence. "The man of perfect faith," says the text, "can extend his influence to inanimate things and disembodied spirits; he can move heaven and earth, and fly to the six cardinal points without encountering any hindrance."

In Christianity, any researches into the powers of the spiritual man have long been doomed from the very beginning. Naturalistic science has, with the exception of a few scientists of prominence, consistently discredited any kind of psychic phenomena. While William James and others among the psychologists allow for the existence of different states of consciousness into which men under certain conditions may enter, and while Dr. J. B. Rhine and his associates at Duke University consider telepathy and "second sight" or pre-vision more common and genuine than commonly allowed, the majority of psychologists relegate psychic phenomena to pathology and delusion. In the main the Roman Catholic Church holds such phenomena, when attested as genuine, to be supernatural revelation, too sacred for analysis or argument. Bible references to these phenomena are accepted as genuine; others are generally viewed

¹⁵ Chuang-Tze, Bk. XVII, 7, Legge's trans.

¹⁶ *Taoist Teachings from the Book of Lieh-Tzu*, translated by Lionel Giles, London, John Murray, 2nd edition, 1947, pp. 43-46.

¹⁷ Chuang-Tze, Bk. I. See Giles, op. cit. p. 39.

with scepticism.¹⁸ It is difficult if not impossible to find in Protestant Christianity any philosophy to explain the nature of these supernatural graces. It might even be safe to say that liberal Protestantism has generally and all too readily accepted the findings of a mechanical psychology which insists on finding physical explanations for all such happenings and which brackets together the inner visions of St. Theresa with the hysterical visions of some unbalanced schoolgirl, and makes the experience of St. Paul and his direct communications with the Lord explainable by a presumed epileptic condition.¹⁹ There are indications in our time that interest in these phenomena as exfoliations of the powers latent in men is coming once more to the fore. At the same time that Professor Henry D. Sidgwick bemoaned the fact that interest in these things appears in cycles, he added: "It is a scandal that the dispute as to the reality of these phenomena should still be going on, so that many competent witnesses should have declared their belief in them, that so many others should be profoundly interested in having the question determined, and yet that the educated, as a body, should still be simply in the attitude of incredulity."²⁰

Professor W. Norman Brown thinks that the story of Jesus' walking on water "is possibly a reflection of the story of the Buddha's conversion of the Kasyapas."²¹ In his text, Professor Brown has no sympathy with the thought that these occult powers are by-products of the practice of meditation, though he quotes faithfully the material from Patanjali's Yoga Sutras. Far from being one of the magical powers of the man spiritually advanced in the science of meditation, Professor Brown believes that the stories, especially those having to do with walking on the water, found their way from East to West when the great Buddhist emperor Asoka sent his missionaries into Asia Minor. The yoga system the professor regards as "a great storehouse of magic practices dignified by philosophy and religion."²²

In the New Testament, there are these evidences of the powers of the advanced spiritual man:

Transmutation of the physical elements, such as changing water into wine (John 2:1-11) and the increase of the loaves and fishes (Matt. 14:25 and 15:32-38, etc.);

Stillng the tempest by control of the winds and the waves (Matt. 8:23-27, Mark 4:37-41, Luke 8:23-25);

Withering the fig tree (Matt. 21:17-22, Mark 11:12-14);

Walking on the water (Matt. 14:25, John 6:19-21);

Making himself invisible—though the narrative is not clear—(Luke 4:30; John 5:13);

¹⁸ See ch. xxxi in A. Poulain, S.J., *The Graces of Interior Prayer*, London, Kegan Paul, Trench and Trubner Co., Ltd. n.d.

¹⁹ See D. A. Hayes, *Paul and His Epistles*, N. Y., The Methodist Book Concern, 1915, p. 44.

²⁰ Quoted by R. C. Johnson, *Psychical Research*, N. Y. Philosophical Library, 1956, p. 1.

²¹ Brown, op. cit., p. 69.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 16.

Power to heal physical infirmities (Matt. chs. 8, 9, etc.);
 Telepathic powers, reading thoughts and foreseeing events (John
 4:17, 29, Matt. 9:4, Luke 5:22, Matt. 26:1-3, 34).

These are the more obvious evidences which are noticeable in the public ministry of Jesus. It is especially to be noted that while Jesus' disciples marvelled at the display of these extraordinary powers, they did not regard them as violations of spiritual laws. These disciples were, it must be remembered, heirs to a prophetic tradition in which Samuel's reading of the mind and heart of Saul; Elijah's restoring to life the widow's son who was dead, and how he brought forth an abundance of rain upon the parched land of Israel; the knowledge of the things that were to come which were foretold by Isaiah and Jeremiah,—were accepted truths. The disciples themselves, we learn, "were given" power to heal the sick, cast out evil spirits, and, whatever may be its true meaning, "raise the dead" (Matt. 10:8). Peter and Paul had knowledge of several of these powers and exercised them—healing sicknesses, foretelling events, perceiving what was in the hearts and minds of men.

It is evident, too, that among the Christian mystics no less than those of the Orient the practice of prayer and meditation and the penetration into inner states of consciousness causes the development of certain of these powers. Accounts are found of how St. Francis of Assisi had the faculty of being able to read the minds of others.²³ There are examples of levitation—involuntary and explained as a divine grace—reported of St. Francis of Assisi, St. Catherine of Siena, St. Teresa of Ávila, St. Philip Neri,²⁴ to say nothing of St. Thomas Aquinas²⁵ and many other mystics who are said by contemporary witnesses to have been lifted above the earth when absorbed in prayer. In her *Life*, St. Teresa writes of how the rapture she often experienced was like a strong eagle which seemed to carry her away on its wings. "It seemed to me, when I tried to make some resistance," she says, "as if a great force beneath my feet lifted me up. I know of nothing with which to compare it . . . I confess that it threw me into a great fear, very great indeed at first; for when I saw my body thus lifted up from the earth, how could I help it? Though the spirit draws it upwards after itself, and that with great sweetness if unresisted, the senses are not lost; at least I was so much myself as to be able to see that I was being lifted up."²⁶

Western mystics and saints are as a rule suspicious of these phenomena and as often as not regard them as wiles of the Devil.²⁷ When

²³ *The Mirror of Perfection*, par. 5. London, Temple Classics, 1903.

²⁴ For sources see *The Mystic Way* by Evelyn Underhill, London, J. M. Dent and Sons, 1913, p. 116 n.

²⁵ See G. K. Chesterton, *Saint Thomas Aquinas* in "The Image Books", Garden City, New York, Doubleday and Co., Inc., p. 134.

²⁶ *The Life of St. Theresa of Jesus*, tr. by David Lewis. N. Y. Benziger Bros., 1916, ch.xx, par. 7 and 9.

²⁷ Thomas Merton, *The Ascent to Truth*, N. Y. Harcourt Brace and Co., 1951, p. 69 and ch. iii in general.

all is said and done, there is in the West no clear system of philosophy by which these phenomena can be explained and understood, hence there are varied views regarding them, and all too often Black Magic and White Magic are confused and mistaken one for the other. Many of these phenomena are undoubtedly deceiving. They are the glittering lights of the psychic world, or as the unknown author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* would have it, "monkey tricks of the soul." Without being philosophers or adepts in the deeper science, some of the western mystics understand enough of the dangers involved to warn against either trusting these phenomena or seeking after them. "O Love," exclaims St. Catherine of Genoa, "I do not wish to follow thee for the sake of these delights, but solely from a motive of true love."²⁸ Even as the Buddha warned his disciples against the vain display of the *iddhis* they had acquired, the great Spanish contemplative, St. John of the Cross, devotes much of his *Ascent of Mount Carmel* to proving the thesis that visions and ecstasies which by some are taken to give us a supernatural knowledge of God, should never be sought after for their own sake. He says that the man who desires "to know anything by extraordinary supernatural ways implies a defect in God." Also: "Inasmuch as they are exterior and in the body, there is less certainty of their being from God. It is more natural that God should communicate Himself through the spirit . . . than through the sense, wherein there is usually danger and delusion; because the bodily sense decides upon and judges spiritual things, thinking them to be what itself feels them to be, when in reality they are as different as body and soul, sensuality and reason."²⁹

In every age and in every land there are the Yogis of the marketplace who would force these latent powers and exhibit them to those who mistake them for evidences of spiritual attainments. In passages which might be taken bodily out of the books of Chuang-tze, the writer of *The Cloud of Unknowing* throws the force of his pungent wit to assail those who, thinking to encompass Spirit with their senses, "turn their bodily wits inward to their bodies against the course of nature; and strain them, as they would see inwards with their bodily eyes, and hear inwards with their ears" More: "They stare in the stars as if they would be above the moon, and hearken when they shall hear any angel sing out of heaven Some of these men the Devil will deceive most wonderfully. For he will send a manner of dew—angel's food they ween it to be—as it were coming out of the air, and softly and sweetly falling in their mouths; and therefore they have it in common to sit gaping as they would catch flies."³⁰

When all is said and done, it seems that discrimination is needed to sift the natural from the distorted, deceptive, and premature development

²⁸ *Life of St. Catherine of Genoa*, p. 8. Quoted by E. Herman, *The Meaning and Value of Mysticism*, London, James Clarke and Son, Ltd., 3rd ed. n.d., p. 187.

²⁹ *The Ascent of Mount Carmel by St. John of the Cross*, trans. by David Lewis. London, Thomas Baker, 1922, pp. 186, 200.

³⁰ *A Book of Contemplation the Which is Called the Cloud of Unknowing, in the Which a Soul is Oned with God*, edited with an Introduction by Evelyn Underhill, London, John M. Watkins, 1912, pp. 237-8 and 254-5.

of these faculties which are latent in all men and which Patanjali and the Eastern teachers say that they are developed in the course of the practice of meditation. The mystics rightly warn the young and unstable against cultivating powers and gifts which cannot be easily distinguished from their counterfeits and which present such a temptation as easily to lead to the devious path of black magic. It is unfortunate that many modern psychologists regard the possession of any of the powers of the spiritual man as evidences of pathology, for this is only one and the baser side of the story. Just as it is true that the man who abuses his physical health loses it, so it is true that the mystic who abuses his psychical health loses it. Yet this ill health, as Evelyn Underhill remarks, is "the natural result not the pathological cause, of the characteristic activity of the mystics."³¹

Some writers, as Miss Underhill, encourage us with the prospect that when man's psychic nature is better understood, it may well turn out that what is now regarded by students of the world's scriptures as myth and allegory and which they now spend so much of their energy trying to trace from its origin in one culture and passage to another, will be recognized as *description*—often distorted and exaggerated—of the activity of powers of the spiritually developed man. She ventures the thought that "The quiet change of attitude which has taken place amongst the rationalistic scholars during the last twenty years in regard to the stigmatisation of the saints—once a pious fairy tale . . . —is a warning against premature judgment in such matters as levitation, foreknowledge, or the curious self-radiance said to be observed in ecstasies of a certain type."³²

³¹ *The Mystic Way*, p. 175.

³² *Ibid.* p. 117.

V.

Concentration, Meditation, Contemplation

"How a man shall draw all his wit within himself" or "how he shall climb above himself"

The Cloud of Unknowing, ch. 51

By Meditation the heart comes to know the joy of entering into the Presence of God and directing towards Him all its thoughts, interests and desires . . . this, says al-Ghazali, is the most excellent of occupations, for by it the heart is enlightened and enabled to contemplate the Vision of God.

Margaret Smith: *Al-Ghazali, the Mystic*, p. 170

Without doubt . . . the wavering mind is hard to hold; but through assiduous practice, and through detachment, it may be held firm. For him who is uncontrolled, union is hard to obtain, but for him whose mind has been brought under his sway, who is controlled, it can be won by the right means.

Bhagavad-Gita, VI.35-6

"Meditation" in its broadest and most particular sense, is enjoined in all systems of religion. In some religions it is a highly developed science, widely known and practiced; in others its laws and fruits are not commonly understood. For the lay adherent only of these systems of religion, meditation oftentimes may mean the same as the vocal prayer of petition or the silent prayer of the heart. As one explores below the surface he sees not only that the religious life is inseparable from meditation, but also that it is a science with certain rules and a way of advancement in spiritual growth with clearly defined milestones.¹ Meditation is at the heart of Hindu and Buddhist spirituality. After many years of close association with Buddhists, Taoists, Confucianists and Hindus, the Lutheran missionary, Dr. Karl Reichelt, became convinced that meditation is the heart-beat of the Asiatic religions. "It is no exaggeration to say," he wrote, "that meditation, i.e., the quiet and devout consideration of life's inner meaning, the listening to the voice of Heaven in the soul, is the method most commonly used and most highly valued among the pious people of the Far East in their search for religious insight, power and peace."²

In the religions of the Far East, meditation is often inextricable from some form of Yoga. The Sanskrit term yoga, which is the science of the union of the individual soul with the Oversoul, passed over into the Chinese to become *ch'an-na* from the Pali *jhanna*) and into the Japanese to become *zen-na* or the more familiar contraction of *zen*. Each of these systems of meditation involves the progressive shedding of the illusions of the emotional, mental and psychic natures until life

¹ Among others, see the stages outlined in the work describing the mysticism of the Orthodox Eastern Fathers in the *Writings from the Philokalia On Prayer of the Heart*, trans. by E. Kadloubovsky and G. E. H. Palmer, London, Faber and Faber, 1951, especially the sections entitled "Instructions to Hesychasts."

² *Meditation and Piety in the Far East*, London, Lutterworth Press, 1953, p. 63

and the universe are known for what they really are.³ The Sanskrit noun *yoga* is derived from the verb *yuga* which means to bring under a yoke or place a yoke upon—hence to train the physical and psychic powers and thus to bring oneself into harmony with the laws of life.⁴ It might be added that *dhyana*, commonly associated with the subject, is really the highest step of the yoga ladder. It is understandable, therefore, that in the East *dhyana* has come to be associated with meditation in general. In the Chinese “to meditate” is expressed by the verb *ta-tso*, “to sit,” or *ching-tso*, “to sit quietly.”⁵

Meditation is the general word which in the manuals of devotion covers three stages: concentration, meditation, and contemplation. These stages naturally overlap, even though they are clearly defined. Thus, while meditation is a mental process in the beginning and involves concentration, at higher levels it transcends the mind, and its subject matter cannot be spoken of except in terms which to the mind are paradoxes. At any rate, it may be said that it is the object of meditation to extricate the consciousness from its identification with the lower life and its interests and to bring it into union with the Divine. As Patanjali says: “When the spiritual man is perfectly disentangled from the psychic body, he attains to mastery over all things and to a knowledge of all.” (III.49) It is worthy of note that this disentanglement of the spiritual man, though expressed differently, is the ideal in the method of prayer which Cardinal de Bérulle set forth for the priests of the Oratory in his *Ars artium*: “Let all of you be amateurs of this truly spiritual science, of this science which has Jesus for its goal, for its object, and for its source; of this science which is only to be learned from Jesus, of this science which has for its principles (1) humility of spirit, (2) purity of heart, (3) self-abnegation, (4) union with Jesus.”⁶

Concentration. In the Yoga Sutras, Patanjali speaks of Concentration (*dharana*) as involving “the binding of the perceiving consciousness to a certain region” (III.1). Spiritual consciousness, he says also, is gained through “the control of the versatile psychic nature” (I.2)—or “the modification of the thinking principle,” as some translators render the passage. Concentration is the power which men possess in varied degree of being able to center their attention on the duties and needs of life, thus becoming single-minded. In the Buddhist *Visuddhi-Magga* or “Path of Purity” (iii) it is spoken of as an “intentness of meritorious thoughts.” Of course, the definitions are varied. By some it is thought of as the power of abstracting a thought or an ideal from its surroundings; some speak of it as the power of individualizing.⁷

³ See the recent study on the relation of Zen to Christian thought in Dom Aelred Graham, *Zen Catholicism*. N. Y., Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1963.

⁴ See further Ernest Wood's *Yoga Dictionary*, s.v. “Yoga.”

⁵ *Ibid.* p. 64.

⁶ Quoted by Patrick Thompson, *Direction in Prayer*, London Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1933, p. 66.

⁷ Shwe Zan Aung, *Compendium of Philosophy*, being a translation of the Abhidhammattha-Sangaha. Edited and revised by Mrs. Rhys Davids. London, Pali Text Society, 1910, p. 54.

In Buddhism, especially, the art of concentration has always been a veritable science, with all the steps minutely described and classified.⁸ There is a "preliminary concentration" and an "intermediate concentration" and "transitional stages." It becomes understandable, when one considers the intricacies of the system, why the beginner in the East is advised "to repair to an adept or expert . . . for instruction. He should have implicit faith in his teacher, and give himself up entirely, body and mind, to him, and act exactly as instructed."⁹

An early obstacle which the beginner must learn to cope with is that of the distracting influences which keep the mind from becoming still. In fact this "tangential tendency" or "buzzing of the mind" as St. Teresa referred to it, places a severe strain on the power of concentration, so that whether one can enter the higher stages depends on whether he is able to rise superior to the distractions. Patanjali says that "Since the dynamic mind-images are held together by the impulses of desire, by the wish for personal reward, by the substratum of mental habit, by the support of outer things desired; therefore, when these cease, the self-production of mind-images ceases." (IV.11) In the literature on the subject, much is said about these dynamic mind-images. Father Poulain, in his *The Graces of Interior Prayer* says that they resemble "frolicsome children who are soon weary sitting quietly at their mother's side. They want to be running about and playing."¹⁰ In Christian mysticism, the ascent to God through these stages is no better illustrated than through the experiences of St. Teresa of Ávila, who knew them by direct knowledge. In her *Life* and in *The Interior Castle*¹¹ she describes the steps of this process of detaching oneself from outward things. What others prefer to speak of as concentration, she calls "the prayer of quiet," and she says that distractions are then most frequent when the prayer of quiet is present in a low degree only. Where the Eastern aspirant regards the dynamic mind-images as unruly horses which need to be brought under control of the will, St. Teresa speaks of the distractions in prayer as "graces" given her from above for spiritual and moral development, or even for her chastening. She accepts them and waits for the Lord's meaning to be revealed. She writes of this persistent distraction: "I know no remedy for it; and hitherto God has told me of none. If He had, most gladly would I make use of it, for I am, as I say, tormented very often."¹² St. Francis de Sales gave this advice to St. Jeanne de Chantal: "Stay in your prayer, and when distractions attack you, turn them away quite gently, if you can; if not, put the best face you can on it, and let the flies bother you as much as they like, whilst you are talking to your God . . . You can brush them away with a gentle,

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 53 ff.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 53.

¹⁰ A. Poulain, S.J., *The Graces of Interior Prayer, A Treatise on Mystical Theology*, 6th ed., n.d., p. 126.

¹¹ See the references in Poulain, p. 126.

¹² *The Life of St. Theresa of Ávila*, tr. by David Lewis. New York: Benziger Bros., 5th edition, 1916, xvii.11. See also xxx.19.

calm movement, but not with an alarm or impatience that would upset you."¹³

The effort to increase the power of concentration by persistent and systematic training, is the first step in the science of interior development. Perfection in this art, say the Eastern teachers and the Western saints, may be acquired by anyone who is willing to give it the necessary attention and practice. In varied ways all life teaches us both the need and the value of it. Success in our work, whatever it be, is directly related to the ability to concentrate all our thoughts and energies upon it, and to see that the mind is not permitted to engage in idle fancies or anxieties. The concentration of our attention upon divine things, is governed by the same psychological laws. The centering of our energies upon any virtue or on a spiritual being, is the first step in establishing *rapproch*.

All devotional books give considerable attention to listing the "adventitious aids" which are helpful in developing concentration. Patanjali recommends "mutterings"—the pronouncing the name of the idea or the Divine reality we are trying to direct our attention to.¹⁴ In the Western manuals, we find provision made for both silent and vocal prayer. In *The Introduction to the Devout Life*, St. Frances de Sales advises that "if during vocal prayer you feel your heart drawn and invited to interior or mental prayer, refuse not to follow this attraction, but allow your thoughts to flow freely in that direction, and be not troubled at not having finished the vocal prayers which you had intended to say; for the mental prayer which you will make in their stead will be more agreeable to God and more useful to your soul."¹⁵ In the so-called Ignatian Methods of Prayer, St. Ignatius de Loyola encourages the development of the imagination in making distinct the vision of the Master Christ. Yet, such is the flexibility of the method with respect to the use of the aids, that we find St. Ignatius laying it down in one of the Annotations (18th) that: "These Spiritual Exercises ought to be adapted to the disposition of those who wish to make them, that is to say, according to their age, education and capacity."¹⁶ St. Teresa of Ávila, though, who attained great heights of contemplation, protested that she could never make use of such aids as imagination and intellectualization: "... for God never endowed me with the gift of making reflections with the understanding, or with that of using the imagination, to any good purpose: my imagination is so sluggish that, even if I would think of, or picture to myself, as I used to labour to picture, our Lord's Humanity, I could never do it." (*Life*, iv.10.)

¹³ Quoted by C. F. Kelley, *The Spirit of Love*, London: Longmans Green and Co., 1952, p. 180.

¹⁴ This repetition of short prayers and sacred verses is a basic discipline in the devotions of the Orthodox Eastern Church. See the *Writings from the Philokalia* and *The Way of a Pilgrim*, *passim*.

¹⁵ Part II, ch. i. note 8.

¹⁶ See this section in *The Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius of Loyola*, translated by W. H. Longridge. London, Mowbray, fourth ed. 1950.

In the higher levels of concentration, not only the senses, but also the ordinary mental processes are subdued, and the bare faculty of *awareness* is left. It is a state in which there is a merging of all the faculties into one sense. We all have a foretaste of it in common experience when, intently absorbed in some novel we are reading, we are deaf and blind to everything about us, yet we sense it as with some newly opened and higher sense when someone enters our room. In concentration, the physical senses are stilled and the mind is subdued, but there is a heightened sense of awareness. By our intentness of will and attention, we identify ourselves with that which we contemplate, and in the high reaches of our intentness, know the thing as it knows itself. "The soul looks and it loves," as someone has put it.

Meditation. Though meditation is often used to cover the full meaning of the soul's indrawal from its connection with the realm of sense and to include both concentration and contemplation, in the more technical sense the word is employed to describe a certain stage of the advance. Patanjali uses the term *dhyana* to designate it, and says that it is "a prolonged holding of the perceiving consciousness in a state of concentration." (III.2) *Dhyana*, or *Jhana* in Pali, is also the Buddhist term for meditation and the contemplative disciplines. A close equivalent in both a specific and general way is the term *Fana*—"the passing from the self"—employed by the Sufi mystics. *Fana* describes both the state attained and the process by which it is attained,—“a process,” says Professor Nicholson, “wherein the soul is stripped of all its desires, affections and interests, so that in ceasing to will for itself it becomes an object of the Divine will, that is, the beloved of God; and that which loves it and which it loves, is now its inward and real self, not the self that has ‘passed away.’”¹⁷

Thus, while the meanings which can be assigned to meditation are many and varied, it is clear that the mastery of the power of concentration is a basic preliminary, and until considerable power of concentration is acquired, true meditation is impossible. Some speak of meditation as the state which ensues when we have learned to center the consciousness in the soul rather than in the mind or the emotions. To discover how varied meditation can be and also how wisely adapted to all sorts and conditions of men, the student is advised to start with these secondary sources and then pass on to the experiences of the mystics and saints they make reference to: A. Poulain, *The Graces of Interior Prayer*, A Treatise on Mystical Theology; Bede Frost, *The Art of Mental Prayer*; Patrick Thompson, *Direction in Prayer*, Studies in Ascetic Method; Aelfrida Tillyard, *Spiritual Exercises and Their Results*; Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism*, Part II, chs. vi-viii; Buddhist Lodge, *Concentration and Meditation*, A Study of Mind Development; Shwe Zan Aung, *Compendium of Philosophy*; Henry Clarke Warren, *Buddhism in Translations*,

¹⁷ R. A. Nicholson, *The Idea of Personality in Sufism*, Cambridge University Press, 1923, pp. 18-19.

ch. IV; Kenneth Morgan (ed.), *The Path of the Buddha*, pp. 144-52; and Hans-Ulrich Rieker, *The Secret of Meditation*. These sources do not pretend to exhaust the list of the many excellent expositions.¹⁸

Though there is no clear-cut dividing line between the state of concentration and that of meditation, there are distinguishing characteristics. It might be said that in concentration the student is consciously controlling his instrument of vision and understanding, is aware of his mental effort, and is also cognizant of the fact that he is keeping at bay the intrusion of extraneous thoughts and trying to harness the imagination so that it might be directed to the object to be focussed upon. When the levels of meditation are reached, the mechanics of concentration pass into the background; the tools are mastered and there is no need to be conscious of their presence. Now, the object of meditation is chosen, and the searchlight of the soul can be directed where desired.¹⁹ If it can be said that meditation is a process of mental gymnastics, very useful for purposes both secular and religious, meditation is definitely religious in orientation and involves entrance into a state of consciousness where the identification with the spiritual is the only thing of importance.

Progress in meditation is made in different ways and generally suited to the temperament of the disciple. Thus, some find progress possible along the lines of one of the branches of Yoga: the way of wisdom (*Jnana Yoga*), or the way of love and spiritual devotion (*Bhakti Yoga*), or the way of dedication to the service of humanity (*Karma Yoga*).²⁰ There is no such a thing as meditation as an end in itself; the inspiration is always from above. St. Ignatius de Loyola laid down the principle, in the *Constitutions* for his Society, that all should seek God in everything, ridding themselves of the love of creatures in order to spend their love on the Creator. Still, it was not an excluding or narrowed love; it was "a way of seeing God in everything and everything in God."²¹ Under some of the Eastern masters, the art of indrawal is a precise science about a country where every mountain and every valley, desert and forest, is marked out, and a country in which no one travels without a competent guide,—“an adept or expert, replete with the sevenfold qualification, for instruction in the art of meditation.”²² In the Spanish Carmelite tradition, St. Teresa requires these directors to possess four qualifications (*Life*, xiii.24-26). She says that they are of little use

¹⁸ For the particular steps in the practice of Meditation, there might be added: Aelfrida Tillyard, *Spiritual Exercises and Their Results*, N. Y., Macmillan Co., 1927; Vladimir Lindenberg, *Meditation and Mankind, Practices in Prayer and Meditation Throughout the World*, London, Rider and Co., 1959; and Edward Conze, *Buddhist Meditation*, London, Allen and Unwin, 1956.

¹⁹ *Meditation and Concentration*, p. 97.

²⁰ Especially valuable for the beginner is a booklet on *Meditation*, by Henry Bedinger Mitchell, N. Y. Quarterly Book Dept.

²¹ Thompson, *Direction in Prayer*, p. 47.

²² Aung, *Compendium of Philosophy*, p. 53. See also St. Francis de Sales, *Introduction to the Devout Life*, Part I, ch. iv.

if they are merely learned men rather than *men of prayer*,—and worse, that the merely learned hinder the progress of the penitents. St. John of the Cross, her contemporary, says the same thing: "Some confessors and spiritual directors, because they have no perception or experience of these ways, are a hindrance and an evil, rather than a help to such souls; they are like the builders of Babel; who, when required to furnish certain materials, furnished others of a very different sort, because they knew not the language of those around them, and thus the building was stopped." (*Ascent of Mount Carmel*, Prologue, 3.)

There is also a basic difference between concentration and meditation which must be allowed for. The kind of concentration which is concerned with the improvement of the memory, the control of wandering thoughts, or how to give direction to the mental energies so as to command them at will, is useful in daily life, and need have neither moral or spiritual significance. Many so-called "yogis" from the East come to America, impress their phenomenal mental powers upon the curious and draw a following to whom they sell lessons on the "occult." In meditation, however, we are concerned with a realm where values are profoundly altered, where motive is of primary importance, and where knowledge or power sought for personal ends is sure to prove destructive in the end. "Purity of motive," says a Buddhist manual, "is of paramount importance, for the slightest trace of selfishness and vanity is apt to grow with lightning speed and, like a pestilential weed, to strangle the flower of nascent spirituality."²³ In the Pali *Visuddhi-Magga*, or "Path of Purity" the Blessed One reveals the Way of Purity under the heads of conduct, concentration and wisdom, making these dependent on one another. "By conduct is indicated the discipline in elevated conduct; by concentration the discipline in elevated thoughts; and by wisdom the discipline in elevated wisdom." . . . "What is the first of the meritorious qualities? Purity of conduct . . .

"To cleanse and purify the thoughts,
'Tis this the holy Buddhas teach."²⁴

What is the purpose of meditation? The Buddhist authors of the treatise on *Concentration and Meditation* make it threefold: to dominate the lower self and its obsession with the sense of separation; to develop the mind's higher faculties towards a vision of life's essential unity; and to unite this dual process in one continuous spiritual unfolding.²⁵ The aims, understandably, are not easily or quickly achieved, for the re-direction and re-orientation of life's energies, so long ruled by the passions and desires of the personal self, are not accomplished without struggle, failure and repeated effort. Both Eastern and Western writers on meditation bring to attention that early efforts are bound to bring results both positive and negative. Any intensification of the inner life is bound

²³ *Concentration and Meditation*, p. 81.

²⁴ Henry Clarke Warren, *Buddhism in Translations*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Oriental Series, vol. 3, 1896, p. 286.

²⁵ p. 87.

to bring to the surface the best and the worst, and seeing alternately both the god and the demon in us, can be unnerving to the sensitive nature. One recalls the struggles of St. Paul narrated in the seventh chapter of the letter to the Romans, or St. Augustine's account of his inner conflict as set forth in the *Confessions*. The Rhineland mystic, John Tauler, himself a confessor and physician of souls noted, in his First Sermon for Whitsunday:

The man who seeks after God finds himself sometimes assailed by anguish and heaviness of heart . . . Such a fear robs him of his peace and plunges him into grief and anxiety . . . He must sweetly repel this bad disposition and quietly preserve his peace of mind . . .²⁶

The Jesuit director of souls, Father J. P. de Caussade, remarked from experience that the path of meditation and interior development is not one which is strewn only with roses. "There is nothing more sublime than contemplation as we find it in books; nothing more beautiful or grander than passive prayer in theory. In practice, there is nothing more humiliating, more crucifying."²⁷ While his words appear to describe the trials of the contemplative state, the remarks apply with equal, if not greater force, to meditation.

However, it should be noted that by the habit of indrawal of the mind's energies from the world of sense and psychic stimulations, the student acquires an increasing measure of equanimity, a calm serenity, and an ability to be "mindful and self-possessed." The mind becomes more and more a clear mirror to reflect the light within. We are told that "Inspiration cannot work through a turbulent instrument, or, to change the analogy, the eye of wisdom cannot see clearly through the mists of emotion and desire."²⁸ In the *Bhagavad-Gita* there is this simile: "As a lamp standing in a windless place flickers not, this is remembered as the similitude of the seeker of union, who, with imagination controlled, joins himself in union with the Soul." (VI.19.)

In one of the texts of the Pali canon, the *Visuddhi-Magga* or "Path of Purity" of Buddhaghosha, forty subjects for meditation are mentioned;²⁹ more than that number are used in the Mahayana schools, and some of the meditations are intricate and detailed and should not be attempted without a suitable guide.³⁰ The forty subjects listed in the treatise of Buddhaghosha are intended to subdue attachment to the senses, to lead the student to the conviction that all existence is but a shadow of reality, and finally to the acquisition of the higher faculties. For a description of the exercises the reader is referred to the selection from the third chapter of the *Visuddhi-Magga* given in Warren's *Buddhism in Translations*, to the few pages in Kenneth Morgan's *Path of the Buddha*,

²⁶ Quoted by C. F. Kelley in *The Spirit of Love*, London, Longmans Green and Co. 1952, p. 257, note 92.

²⁷ *Spiritual Instructions*, Dial, xii, Quoted in *The Graces of Interior Prayer*, p. 15n.

²⁸ *Concentration and Meditation*, pp. 91-2.

²⁹ See Warren's *Buddhism in Translations*, ch. IV, pp. 291-2; *Concentration and Meditation*, p. 104 ff.; Morgan's *The Path of Buddha*, pp. 144-52; Tillyard, ch. III.

³⁰ See Aung's *Compendium of Philosophy*, p. 53; Tillyard, pp. 3-5, etc.

and especially to the greater detail found in Part IX of Anuruddha's *Abbidhammattha-Sangaha*, translated by Shwe Zan Aung as "Compendium of Philosophy" and published by the Pali Text Society. There are these cycles or "stations" of exercises:

1. The ten devices (also called *kasinas*, *kasina-mandalas* or "hypnotic circles.") (Meditation on the symbols of the physical elements, the colors, light and space devices, is intended to aid in detachment from the illusion of the reality of external things.)
2. The ten impurities (associated with the physical body). (These are intended to show the unreality of the body and thus enable the disciple to see it as a vehicle of consciousness.)
3. The ten recollections or "reflections." (The reflections are on such subjects as the virtues of the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Order and certain abstract virtues.)
4. The four sublime states or "illimitables." (These are listed as *Metta*—universal love or lovingkindness; *Karuna*—universal compassion, "the law of love eternal"; *Mudita*—"sympathetic joy," the happiness of others; *Upekkha*—equanimity, detachment, serenity.)
5. The four formless states (also called immaterial stages and the four illimitables). (The "illimitables" are listed as Infinite Space, Infinite Consciousness, No-thing-ness, the All and the Void.) In this last, "in a sphere of neither perception nor non-perception, is the limit of *karmic* action, the state of *Samadhi* which is the final stage of the Noble Eightfold Path."
6. Buddhagosha adds the one notion—"meditation on the loathsomeness of food" and
7. The one discrimination or analysis—that of the four primary elements.

Contemplation. Proficiency in meditation leads the disciple to the point where he can not only carry it on for longer periods of time and without strain, but also to the deeper stage where the mental processes are held in abeyance, as is the activity of the senses. In this state only the bare faculty of *awareness* remains. We are aware of the idea or thing we are contemplating—of its unity and essence. It is as when, by meditating on our affection for a friend, we come to transcend the duality of the mind, rise above comparisons, and, as the heart is awakened, would then be able to center our energies on the subject of Love and feel attracted to union with the Divine Lover. This, without detailing the steps, is what the Christian saints and Sufi mystics claim that they did, as they meditated on the Master Christ or the Beloved. St. Teresa puts it that "The soul understands, in a manner different from understanding by the exterior senses, that she is now placed near her God But, you may ask, how can a person who is *incapable of sight* and hearing see or know these things? I reply that he perceives them clearly afterwards not by any *vision*, but by a certitude which remains in the heart and which God alone could give" ³¹

Among the writers on the subject, contemplation is variously defined and understood. Certain of the mystics, like St. Teresa of Ávila,

³¹ *The Way of Perfection*, ch. xxxi, and the *Interior Castle*, Fifth Mansion, I.9.

enter into it without professing to be able to explain it. "So deeply imprinted on the spirit is the sight it has enjoyed of Him, that it only desires to behold Him again. I have already said that, even by the imagination, nothing is seen, which in this prayer can be called even imaginary vision. I speak of it as 'sight' because of the comparison I used."³² "But if we did not see it how can we feel so sure about it? That I do not know: it is the work of the Almighty, and I am certain that I am speaking the truth."³³ The Flemish mystic, Jan van Ruysbroeck, puts the matter in more measured terms: "Our reason abides there with open eyes in the darkness, that is, in an abysmal ignorance; and in this darkness the abysmal splendor remains covered and hidden from us, for its overwhelming unfathomableness blinds our reason."³⁴ In the *Yoga Sūtras*, Patanjali describes contemplation as the stage "When the perceiving consciousness is wholly given to illuminating the essential meaning of the object contemplated, and is freed from the sense of separateness and personality." (III.3) The Sanskrit word for contemplation is *śamādhi*,—a state also described as one of "spiritual ecstasy consequent on complete elimination of all sense of separateness resulting from continued meditation on Reality."³⁵ *Samā śamādhi*, "right" or "perfect" contemplation, is the last stage of the Buddhist Noble Eightfold Path and the prelude to Nirvana. Whatever the variations of the meaning of the word, it is intended to describe a transcendental state in which there is a clear, intuitive knowledge of the idea or the being upon which the consciousness is directed, oftentimes leading into a condition described as ecstasy and union.

In many of the experiences of the mystics, *śamādhi* comes as a "flash" of light, and in describing this, Western and Eastern experimenters are often in common accord. In the Buddhist books on meditation, there are frequent references to *khanika*, "a flash of insight."³⁶ St. Augustine, too, in describing his experience, says "with the flash of one trembling glance it [the inward faculty] arrived at THAT WHICH IS. And then I saw Thy invisible things understood by the things which are made. But I could not fix my gaze thereon; and my infirmity being struck back, I was thrown again on my wonted habits . . ."³⁷ The Sufi mystics commonly used the same figure. Thus, al-Ghazali and Quisharyi both compare the Divine revelation which comes to those who await it, to flashes of light (*lawāih*), then rays of light (*tawālī*) and then the light shining in its full splendor (*lawāmī*).³⁸ It is not without significance that another Sufi, Jami, entitled his verses *Lawāih*—"Flashes of Light,"—"as explanatory of the intuitions and

³² *Interior Castle*, Sixth Mansion, I.1.

³³ *Ibid.* Fifth Mansion, I.9.

³⁴ *The Sparkling Stone*, IX, 43, p. 207 in the translation by C. A. Wynschenk Dom. London, John M. Watkins, 1951

³⁵ *Concentration and Meditation*, p. 315.

³⁶ Mrs. C.A.F. Rhys Davids, *Buddhist Psychology*, An Inquiry into the Analysis and Theory of Mind in Pali Literature, London, G. Bell and Sons, Ltd. 1914, p. 115.

³⁷ Book VII. 17, Pusey's Trans.

³⁸ Smith, *Al-Ghazali*, p. 127.

verities displayed on the pages of the hearts and minds of men of insight and divine knowledge, and of those who enjoy spiritual raptures and ecstasies."³⁹ It is al-Ghazali again, who tells us that when the truth-seeker is free from all distractions, the Light of God will shine upon his heart. At the start it is like a blinding flash of light. Its sojourn is brief at first, but it will return, for its vision is but the prelude to an ever-increasing communion with God.⁴⁰

The universal testimony is that what is experienced in contemplation transcends silence and symbol. It is a "dazzling darkness," and the Spirit itself dwells "in light inaccessible"⁴¹ which no man has seen or can see. Ruysbroeck thus aptly speaks of it:

When we have become *Voyant* (when we have attained to spiritual lucidity) we are able to contemplate in joy the eternal coming of the Bridegroom What, then, is this eternal coming of our Bridegroom? It is a perpetual new birth and a perpetual new illumination hence the manifestation of the Eternal Light is renewed without interruption in the most secret part of our souls. Behold! all human works and active virtues are here transcended; for God discloses Himself only at the apex of the soul. Here there is nought else but an eternal contemplation of and dwelling upon the Light, by the Light and in the Light.⁴²

He says also that contemplation places us in a purity and a radiance far above our understanding, and that few men attain to it because of "our incapacity and the hiddenness of that light wherein alone we can contemplate." He who is united to God and illumined by this truth—"he can understand Truth by Truth."⁴³ In their descriptions of the experiences of contemplation the earlier Western mystics are not so guarded about the nature of their personal relations to it as some of the mediaeval church mystics, such as Ruysbroeck, Eckhart and Lull found it necessary to be, so that their pages are considered of "doubtful orthodoxy."⁴⁴ Plotinus and Dionysius the Areopagite speak in bolder terms. Says the latter: "We must contemplate things divine by our whole selves standing out of our whole selves; becoming wholly of God."⁴⁵ "To see and to have seen that Vision," notes Plotinus, "is reason no longer. It is more than reason, before reason, and after reason, as also is the vision which is seen. And perhaps we should not speak here of *sight*: for that which is seen—if we must speak of seer and seen as two and not one—is not discerned by the seer, nor perceived by him as a second

³⁹ *Lawa'ib*, A Treatise on Sufism by Nur-ud-din Jami, with a translation by E. H. Winfield and Mirza Muhammad Kazvini. London, Royal Asiatic Society, 1906, p. 19.

⁴⁰ Margaret Smith; *Studies in Early Mysticism in the Near and Middle East*. London, The Sheldon Press, 1931, p. 214.

⁴¹ I Tim. vi. 16, Douay Version.

⁴² *Adornment of the Spiritual Marriage*, Bk. III, ch. 3, quoted by Evelyn Underhill in her *Mysticism*, pp. 411-12.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, Bk. III, ch. 1.

⁴⁴ See the caution about interpreting the words of the mediaeval mystics so as to avoid intimations of pantheism in M.L. Shrady, *Come, South Wind*, N.Y.: Pantheon Books, 1957, pp. 7-8.

⁴⁵ *On the Divine Names*, Book VII.1.

thing. Therefore this vision is hard to tell of: for how can a man describe as other than himself that which, when he discerned it, seemed not other, but one with himself indeed?"⁴⁶

It is of interest to note that in certain of the Mahayana schools the emphasis is not upon contemplating a thing or an object, achieving a state of mind or a condition of purity. In the last case, especially, meditation or contemplation of purity in any way or manner would cause one to become "purity-ridden," and his Essence of Mind be thereby disturbed or obscured. Meditation and the higher reaches of contemplation really indicate the degree to which the Essential Mind is disentangled from the veils of illusion. "To meditate," the Sixth Patriarch of Chinese Buddhism, Wei Lang (or Hui Neng), explained to his audience, "means to realize inwardly the imperturbability of the Essence of Mind." Actually, meditation is an exercise in right self-identification. A portion of the Patriarch's address will make clear what is accomplished through *dhyana* and *samadhi*, and also how it should be borne in mind that the two terms are used to indicate the stages of the awakening of the Essential Man, rather than a progress or upward journey of the soul.

Learned Audience, what are Dhyana and Samadhi? Dhyana means to be free from attachments to all outer objects, and Samadhi means to attain inner peace. If we are attached to outer objects, our inner mind will be perturbed. When we are free from attachment to all outer objects, the mind will be in peace. Our Essence of Mind is intrinsically pure, and the reason why we are perturbed is because we allow ourselves to be carried away by circumstances we are in. He who is able to keep his mind unperturbed, irrespective of circumstances, has attained Samadhi.

To be free from attachment to all outer objects is Dhyana, and to attain inner peace is Samadhi. When we are in a position to deal with Dhyana and to keep our inner mind in Samadhi, then we are said to have attained Dhyana and Samadhi. The Bodhisattva Sila Sutra says, "Our Essence of Mind is intrinsically pure." Learned audience, let us realize this for ourselves at all times. Let us train ourselves, practice it by ourselves, and attain Buddhahood by our own effort.⁴⁷

All this is in accord with the Mahayana idea that the wisdom of enlightenment is inherent in every man. "It is because of the delusion under which our mind works that we fail to realize it ourselves, and that we have to seek the advice and guidance of enlightened ones before we can know our own Essence of Mind."⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Ennead VI.9.10.

⁴⁷ *The Sutra of Wei Lang*, translated from the Chinese by Wong Mou-Lam, and published for the Buddhist Society, London, by Luzac and Co., 1944, p. 52.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.* p. 27.

VI.

Systems of Meditation—Parallels in the Upward Way

A very early Sufi ascetic, 'Abd al-Wahid b. Zayd, who was renowned for his austerity and sanctity of life, made the observation that

"The ways are various, the way to the Truth is but one"¹

It is noteworthy that the saints and those skilled in the science of prayer say virtually the same thing with regard to methods that are to be used to attain the goals of meditation. In a letter to the Provincial of Aragon, for instance, St. Francis Borgia speaks of the *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius as a good guide for beginners, but he adds that others may use other methods of prayer, "for the leadings of the Holy Spirit are diverse, as are the talents and the minds of men."² Wisely did St. Ignatius provide that the *Spiritual Exercises* "ought to be adapted to the disposition of those who wish to make them, that is to say, according to their age, education or capacity, lest to one illiterate or of weak constitution, there be given things he cannot bear without inconvenience and by which he cannot profit."³ Some are to be fed with milk and others with meat; each with the food he can best use.

Again it is notable that the purpose of meditation, though variously phrased, is essentially the same. The Mahayanist says that the object of Dhyana is to find the Buddha within. As the *Sutra of Wei Lang* phrases it, "To meditate means to realize inwardly the imperturbability of the Essence of Mind."⁴ The Zenist, Yengo, says that "The great truth of Zen is possessed by everybody Look into your own being transcend the intellect, sever yourself from the understanding, and directly penetrate deep into the identity of the Buddha-mind"⁵ The aim of the doctrine of the Sufis, says al-Ghazali, "is to cut off the passions of the soul and to purge it of its evil tendencies and bad qualities until one arrives thereby at disengaging the heart of all save God, and occupying it only with the remembrance of Him."⁶ The aim fostered by the Ignatian, Bérullian, and Salesian Schools of Prayer is to bring the disciple to union with Jesus. The Jesuit, Père J. P. de Caussade, has already been quoted as saying that the aim of his exercises in *Self-Abandonment to Divine Providence* is "to form Jesus Christ in the depths of our hearts." "With this contemplation," writes the Flemish

¹ Margaret Smith, *Studies in Early Mysticism in the Near and Middle East*, London, The Sheldon Press, 1931, p. 185.

² Bede Frost, *The Art of Mental Prayer*, London, Philip Allan, 1935, p. 52.

³ W. H. Longridge, *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola*, London, A. R. Mowbray and Co., 4th ed. 1950, p. 17.

⁴ op. cit. p. 52.

⁵ Cited by D. T. Suzuki, *An Introduction to Zen Buddhism*, N.Y. The Philosophical Library, 1949, p. 46.

⁶ From the *Munqidh* ("Deliverance from Error"), quoted by Margaret Smith, *Studies in Early Mysticism*, etc., pp. 169-70.

mystic, Ruysbroeck, "there is bound up, an exercise which is wayless, that is to say, a naughting of life; for, where we go forth out of ourselves . . . there shines perpetually the simple ray of the splendour of God, in which we are grounded and which draws us out of ourselves into the superessence . . ."⁷ Patanjali's Yoga aphorisms, the most systematic treatise on the subject of meditation and contemplation, begin with the keynote that it is "an instruction in union." (I.1, Johnston's translation.) At the end of the treatise we are told that

Pure spiritual life is, therefore, the inverse resolution of the potencies of Nature, which have emptied themselves of their value for the Spiritual Man; or it is the return of the power of pure Consciousness to its essential form. (IV.34)

With this explanation of the aims of systems of meditation, it will be of interest to show in an expanded outline form, in what manner "the ways are various, but the way to the Truth is one."

A. *Parallels in Hindu and Christian Writers*

The Four Qualifications for Discipleship in the Teachings of Shankaracharya (*Hinduism*) and some Christian Mystics (Thomas à Kempis, Miguel de Molinos, and Abbot Blossius):⁸

First Qualification: Discernment between the Eternal and the non-Eternal.

The conviction that the Eternal is enduring and all else is unenduring. (Shankaracharya: *Tattva Bodha*)

When shall I die to myself and to all created things? when shall nothing live in me but only Thou? (Blossius: *A Short Rule*, p. 28)

For Thy sake I renounce all perishable things. I cast aside with contempt everything that is not of Thee. (*Ibid.*, p. 48)

Second Qualification: Freedom from self-indulgence in the fruit of works.

It is freedom from any wish for the feasts of this world, or of paradise. (*Tattva Bodha*)

Know that he who would attain to the mystical science must abandon and be detached from five things: from creatures, from temporal things, from the very gifts of the Holy Spirit, from himself, and he must be lost in God. (Molinos: *Spiritual Guide*, iii.18)

Third Qualification: Quietude, Control, Cessation, Endurance, Faith, Concentration—the six virtues enumerated in *Brihad-Aranyaka Upanishad*, IV.4.23.

⁷ *The Sparkling Stone*, 44.

⁸ This material on the Four Qualifications is abbreviated from Charles Johnston's translation of *The Crest Jewel of Wisdom (Vivekachudamani)* attributed to Shankara Acharya. N.Y. Quarterly Book Dept., 1925, pp. 105 ff.

Quietude: It is mastery over the mental-emotional nature. (*Tattva Bodha*.)

Inner solitude consists in the forgetting of all creatures, in detachment, in a perfect abnegation of all purpose, desire, thought and will. This is the true solitude wherein the soul reposes with a sweet and inward serenity in the arms of the Highest Good. (*Spiritual Guide*, iii.12)

Control: It is the mastery over the eyes and the other outward powers. (*Tattva Bodha*)

Most diligently keep guard over the eyes, the ears and the tongue, in order to shun things unlawful, vain and useless.... All the bodily members should be carefully kept under restraint. (*Short Rule*, p. 58)

Cessation: The excellent Cessation is the condition of refusing to lean on external things. (Shankaracharya: *Vivekachudamani*)

It is bringing each power back in its own proper sphere. (*Tattva Bodha*)

Learn to despise outward things and to give thyself to things inward, and thou shalt perceive the Kingdom of God to come in thee. (à Kempis: *Imitation of Christ*, II.i)

For if the soul does not detach herself from her own appetites and desire, from her own will, from spiritual gifts, and from repose even in spiritual things, she can never attain to this high felicity of inner solitude. (*Spiritual Guide*)

Endurance: It is the bearing of all pains without rebelling against them, unconcerned and unlamenting. (*Vivekachudamani*)

Injuries, ridicule, calumnies, sorrows and losses.... he must learn to bear humbly, without complaint or murmuring, believing with a full conviction of mind that they are sent by God. (*Short Rule*, p. 10)

Faith: Faith is the firm conviction of the truth of the teaching and the word of the Master. (*Vivekachudamani*)

It is a great matter to live in obedience, to live under a superior, and not to be at our own disposing.... Go whither thou wilt, thou shalt find no rest but in humble subjection under the government of a superior. (*Imitation*, I.9)

Concentration: It is the continual staying of the soul in the pure Eternal at all times, and not the caressing of imaginations. (*Vivekachudamani*)

It is one-pointedness of thought and imagination. (*Tattva Bodha*)

He that is wise and well-instructed in the Spirit standeth fast upon these changing things; not heeding what he feelth in himself or which way the wind of instability bloweth.... For thus he will be able to continue one and the same unshaken, in the midst of so many various events directing continually the single eye of his intent unto me. (*Imitation*, III.33)

Fourth Qualification: Desire for Liberation.

The ardent Desire for Liberation is the will to be rid of all the fetters forged by un wisdom, beginning with self-reference and ending with the body, through discernment of the real nature of the Divine Self. (*Vivekachudamani*)

Love desires to be free, and estranged from all worldly affections, that so its inward sight may not be hindered; that it may not be entangled by any temporal prosperity or entangled by any adversity. (*Imitation*, III.4, 5)

B. *Buddhism.*

In Buddhism there are as varied methods of Meditation as there are in Christianity. In the *Psalms of the Brethren* and *Psalms of the Sisters*, where the principal teachings of Buddhism are found in "psalms" composed by some of the ancient disciples, the Upward Way is thus summarized:

And first as a novice, virtuous and keen
To cultivate the upward, mounting way,
To cast out lust and with it all ill-will,
And therewith one by one, the deadly Drugs.
And then to the Bhikkhuni of ripening powers
Rose in a vision mem'ries of the past.
Limpid and clear the mystic vistas grew,
Expanding by persistent exercise.
Act, speech and thought, I saw not myself,
Children of cause, fleeting, impermanent,
And now with every poisonous Drug cast out,
Cool and serene, I see Nibbana's peace.⁹

In fivefold concentrated ecstasy,
My heart goes up in peace and unity,
Serene composure have I made my own;
My vision as a god's is clarified,
I know the destinies of other lives—
Whence beings come and whither they do go;
Life here below or otherwise of life—
Steadfast and rapt, in fivefold Jhana sunk.¹⁰

One will notice in the verses echoes and references to an original purgation, where the commandments are lived in measurable completeness; of the gathering of thoughts in concentration; of the stages of meditation; and of the contemplation which brings the disciple to the threshold of the peace of Nibbana (Sk.—Nirvana). However, the steps in the upward way may be made more specific in terms of the Dhamma or Teaching of the Buddha, along with parallels from Christian sources. There is this progression:

The Four Noble Truths:

It is through not understanding, through not penetrating the Four Aryan (Noble) Truths, O Bhikkhus, that we have wandered round this long, long journey, you and I. (*Dhiga Nikaya*, ii.90)

⁹ *Therigatba* or "Psalms of the Sisters," Verses 99-101.

¹⁰ *Tberagaiba* or "Psalms of the Brethren," verses 916 ff. See the collections of Mrs. Rhys Davids' *Psalms of the Early Buddhists*, London, Pali Text Society.

1. *Suffering (Dukka)*

Which, O Bhikkus, think you is the greater, the tears which you have poured out, wailing and lamenting on this long pilgrimage . . . joined to the unloved, separated from the loved, or the waters of the Four Great Seas? (*Samyutta Nikaya*, 52)

In the world you have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world. (*John* 16:33, RSV)

God . . . will wipe away every tear from their eyes . . . for the former things have passed away. (*Revelation* 21:4, RSV)

2. *Desire for the things which bring suffering (Tanha, Trishna; also Kama)*

Verily it is this thirst or craving, causing the renewal of existence, accompanied by sensual delight, seeking satisfaction now here, now there, the craving for the satisfaction of the passions, for continued existence in the worlds of sense. (*Buddhist Suttas*, SBE, XI, p. 148 (54))

Monks, everything is burning . . . it is burning with the fire of passion, with the fire of hatred, with the fire of delusion; it is burning with birth, old age, dying, grief, sorrow, suffering, lamentation, despair. (*Vinaya Pitaka*, i.34)

Do not love the world or the things of the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passes away, and the lust of it . . . (*I John* 2:15-17, RSV)

Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break through and steal . . . For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. (*Matt.* 6:19, 21)

He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. (*John* 12:25)

3. *The Overcoming of Desire*

The world is carried away by the streams of craving; from its whirlpool there is no salvation. But wisdom is a staunch vessel, and meditation is a firm support. (*Fo-sho-bing-tsang-king*)¹¹

Ye who are earnest in learning for the sake of nirvana . . . consider well the lives of those unreflecting, careless, negligent, uncontrolled and lazy men who have turned away from learning . . . Arise, commence a new life, turn towards the doctrine of the Buddha; trample down the

¹¹ *What is Buddhism*, p. 59.

hosts of the Lord of death Whoever has lived according to this law of discipline, in gentleness and purity, will, having cast off transmigration, put an end to his misery. (*Udanavarga: A Collection of Verses from the Buddhist Canon*, IV.32,34,35)¹²

Then Desire conceives and breeds Sin, while Sin matures and gives birth to Death. (*James* 1:15, Moffatt)

To set the mind on the flesh is death; but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. (*Romans* 8:6, Goodspeed)

4. *The Means for Obtaining the conquest of Desire*

What is the root of evil? Craving, hatred and delusion are the root of evil. And what is the root of good? To be free from hatred, craving and delusion is the root of good. (*Samyutta Nikaya*, 60)

And what, O priests, is the noble truth of the path leading to the cessation of misery?

It is this noble eightfold path (*Digba-Nikaya*, Sutta 22; Warren, p. 373)

Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest . . . learn of me . . . For my yoke is easy and my burden is light. (*Matthew* 11:28-30)

The Eightfold Noble Path:

No man can truly call himself a Buddhist if he has not entered the Noble Eightfold Path which represents the morality of Buddhism, and in Buddhism, the moral life is no mere adjunct, but its very core and essence. He who has merely understood the Dhamma but has not shaped his life and thought in accordance with its spirit is like one who, having read a book on cookery, imagines he has eaten the food therein described. (*Essence of Buddhism*, p. 224)

The Noble Eightfold Path is a system of graded development according to law, a graded process of moral evolution within the law of Karma. It is the Middle Way between the two extremes of unnatural asceticism and self-indulgence (*What is Buddhism*, p. 107)

1. *Right Understanding* ("Right" means the highest or the best—that which corresponds to reality.)

Samma Ditthi, thus, means an intellectual grasp of the Teaching of the Dhamma, a realization of the Three Signs of Being, the Noble Truth, the nature of self, and the law of Karma. (*What is Buddhism*, p. 108)

¹² Translated by W. Woodville Rockhill, London, Kegan Paul, Trench, Truebner and Co. Ltd., 1892, p. 23-4.

Tell me, ye that desire to be under the law, do ye not hear the law? For it is written that Abraham had two sons, the one by a bondmaid, the other by a freewoman. But he who was of the bondmaid was born after the flesh; but he of the free-woman was by promise. Which things are an allegory (*Galatians*, 4:21 ff)

2. *Right Resolution or Right Attitude of Mind*

Resolving to conform one's life to these Four Noble Truths by a life of wise restraint and zealous effort to attain, through mind-control, self-realization of Mind-Essence. (*Zen*, A Buddhist Magazine, Vol. VI, No. 2, p. 4)

It is Right Desire, the Path of Altruism and Love. (*What is Buddhism*)

But seek first His Kingdom and righteousness, and all these things shall be given you in addition. (*Matthew* 6:33, Weymouth)

3. *Right Speech*

Its essence is control, until our every word is courteous, considerate and scrupulously true . . . Silence should be so respected that the words which break it must be such as to leave the world better for their birth. (*What is Buddhism*, p. 109)

. . . every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give an account thereof in the day of judgment. (*Matthew* 12:36)

If any man among you seem to be religious and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain. (*James* 1:26)

4. *Right Action or Right Behavior*

Action is two-fold: positive, or what we do; negative, or what we refrain from doing. The negative is expressed in the *Pancha-Sila*, the Five Precepts or Vows to abstain from killing, stealing, sensuality, slander and intoxicating liquors and drugs. But the Tathagata laid it down . . . that these precepts equally apply to the mind. Murder is none the less murder in that it never left the heart, and a slanderous thought is as harmful to its thinker and his enemies as any spoken word. Again, it is possible to get

¹⁸ See also Attar, *The Conference of the Birds* in *The Wisdom of the East Series*, London, John Murray, 1932, pp. 19ff.; Margaret Smith's *Studies in Early Mysticism in the Near and Middle East*, London, The Sheldon Press, 1931, p. 170 ff.; Margaret Smith's *The Sufi Path of Love*, London, Luzac and Co. Ltd., especially chapters IV, V, and VI; and A. Poulain, *The Graces of Interior Prayer*, especially Part II. for parallels with the teachings of the Catholic mystics.

drunk on excitement; theft is no less theft because it wears the cloak of custom, and a lustful thought befouls its owner's purity. (*What is Buddhism* p. 109)

Compare the Five Commandments in Mark 10:19 and Luke 18:20, the Six enumerated in Matthew 19:18 ff and in Romans 13:8 ff, and the intensification of the meaning of the Mosaic Law given by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount —e.g. Matthew 5:21, 27, 34, 43, etc.

5. *Right Livelihood*

... consists in following a trade or occupation compatible with the other precepts. (*What is Buddhism*, p. 120)

Right Vocation. One should avoid any calling that involves oppression, injustice, acquisitiveness, impurity, or deceit. (*Zen*, A Buddhist Magazine, Vol. VI, No. 2, p. 4)

... every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour. For we are labourers together with God. (I *Corinthians*, 3:8, 9)

6. *Right Effort*

The Efforts have been given as Four. To preserve new evil entering into one's mind; to remove all evil that is there; to develop such good as is in one's mind; to acquire still more unceasingly. (*What is Buddhism*, p. 120-1)

It is "seeking to be controlled by the Six Paramitas: charity, good behavior, patience, zeal, concentration of mind, and wisdom." (*Zen*, A Buddhist Magazine, Vol. VI, p. 5)

This I say, then, walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.... Now the works of the flesh are these: Adultery, fornication, uncleanness.... But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance.... If we live in the Spirit let us also walk in the Spirit. (*Galatians* 5:16 ff)

7. *Right Recollection or Right Mindfulness*

Being thoughtful at all times, seeking the mean and significance of the things one experiences and learns. (*Zen*, A Buddhist Magazine, Vol. VI, No. 2, p. 5)

Having acquired some degree of moral and physical control, we undertake *Bhavana*, the control and evolution of the mind.... As a high standard of ethics is a prerequisite to a grasp of pure philosophy because of the great power which such knowledge gives, so mind-control.... is a vital factor in the treading of the Eightfold Path. This need for being "ever mindful and self-possessed" is

insisted upon throughout the Buddhist scriptures, the four-fold introspection being directed to the body, the feelings, thoughts and ideas, each being analysed by their possessor as the actions of a head-strong and impulsive servant might be supervised by a master who demanded discipline. (*What is Buddhism*, p. 121)

Stand fast, therefore, in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage. (*Galatians*, 5:1)

8. *Samma Samadhi—Right Meditation, Right Concentration*

The practice at all times of strict mind-control, over one's thoughts, words, and acts; being especially zealous in the discipline of dhyana . . . the effort to enter intuitively into Mind-essence. (*Zen*, A Buddhist Magazine, Vol. VI, No. 2, p. 5)

In its higher stages, *Samma Samadhi* involves "the attainment of that Universal Consciousness described by mystics throughout the ages in a thousand different ways, yet ever incommunicable to lesser minds. It may be described as an immediate insight into the nature of the Universe . . . by means of a knowledge far transcending reason. This height attained, the Pilgrim has attained the title 'free' from the Fetters of *Avidya*, Ignorance . . . and he finds himself upon the threshold of Nirvana, the Abode of Peace." (*What is Buddhism*, p. 123-4)

When that day comes, you will know that I am in union with my Father and you are with me, and I am with you. It is he who has my commandments and observes them that really loves me, and whoever loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and show myself to him. (*John* 16:20, Goodspeed)

C. *The Seven Stages of the Sufi's Return to God* (with parallels from *The Ascent of Mount Carmel* of St. John of the Cross)

Those who have trodden the mystic Way, we read, are agreed that when a man has passed through the "stations" and the "states" and is no more subject to change or decay, and has acquired all virtuous qualities, he is no longer endowed with qualities. His presence with God is continuous, and when he has reached this stage he has passed away from this world and the next, and in the disappearance of his humanity he has become Divine (*rabbani*) . . . God has fulfilled in him that which He willed for him, that his last state should become his first again, and that he should now be as he was before he came into existence . . .¹⁴

¹⁴ Smith, *Studies in Early Mysticism*, etc., p. 216.

1. The Sufi enters the first stage of the pilgrimage as a "Searcher" after God, placing himself in His hand, to be tested and tried.

This Trust "is the casting of the soul into self-surrender (*al-ubudiyya*) and the withdrawing of it from self-assertion (*al-rububiyya*)." (Dhul'Nun al Misri)¹⁵

It is therefore supreme ignorance for anyone to think that he can ever attain to the high estate of union with God before he casts away from him the desire of natural things, and of supernatural also, so far as it concerns self-love For he who does not withdraw himself from the things of the world is not qualified to receive the Spirit of God in the pure transformation. (*Ascent of Mount Carmel*, I, 5, 2, p. 22)¹⁶

2. When the Divine attraction has developed his inclination to the love of God, he has reached the stage of *Ishaq*, "love."

"Tell My people that I am the Lover of him who loves Me and the Companion of him who desires My company, and in fellowship with him who desires My fellowship and the Friend of him who is My friend: I choose him who has chosen Me. There is none who has loved Me with a perfect heart, but I have received him unto Myself and I have loved him with a love passing that of creatures" (al-Ghazali)¹⁷

Love begets a likeness between the lover and the object of his love He, therefore who loveth anything beside God renders his soul incapable of the divine and transformation in God. (*Ascent of Mount Carmel*, I, 4, 2, 3)

3. When all worldly desires have been expelled from his heart, he arrives at the third stage, *Zudb*—"renunciation," the crowning achievement of the ascetic discipline.

The real meaning of detachment from the world is to be separated outwardly from all possessions and inwardly from what is unreal. It is to take nothing from what belongs to this world, nor to seek anything in exchange for what has been renounced of things transitory, not even eternity itself. That renunciation has been made for the sake of the One True God, for no cause or reason save for Him alone. (al-Kalabadhi)¹⁸

That thou mayest have pleasure in everything, seek pleasure in nothing.

¹⁵ An Egyptian Sufi quoted by Margaret Smith in her *al-Ghazali, The Mystic*, p. 168.

¹⁶ Translated by David Lewis, London, Thomas Baker, 1922.

¹⁷ From a tradition of what the Lord said to David. Quoted in *al-Ghazali the Mystic*, p. 180.

¹⁸ *Studies in Early Mysticism etc.*, p. 165.

That thou mayest know everything, seek to know nothing.
 That thou mayest possess all things, seek to possess nothing.
 That thou mayest be everything, seek to be nothing....

In detachment, the spirit finds quiet and repose, for coveting nothing, nothing wearies it by elation, and nothing oppresses it by dejection, because it stands in the center of its own humility. (*Ascent of Mount Carmel*, I.13, 10, 12)

4. The pilgrim reaches next *Ma'rifat*, "knowledge," as the result of his intentness with the nature and attributes of the works of God. Says Goldziher: "One of the most important of the Sufi stations is called *Murakaba*, that is, Meditation."¹⁹

Thoughts of Thee are my Constant Companions....
 (Ansari of Herat)

The person who sees existing things and thinks deeply on them and by correct progress advances from the lowest to the highest obtains knowledge of his Lord in such a way that he has no doubt or questioning. And it is possible that he may see God in the way that it is possible for the creature to see God. (Ibn Miskawaih)

Gnosis (*ma'rifa*) is nearer to silence than to speech.
 (Abu Sulayman al-Darani)

This divine knowledge concerning God never relates to particular things, because it is conversant with the Highest, and therefore cannot be explained unless when it is extended to some truth less than God.... It is only a soul in union with God that is capable of this profound loving knowledge, for it is itself that union. (*Ascent of Mount Carmel*, II.26.5)

5. The fifth stage is *Wajd*, "ecstasy," a foretaste and condition of his release from attachment to the phenomenal life, and his union with God.

Ecstasy (*wajd*) is an expression for what is experienced in listening to music, and music carries me to the place where Beauty dwells and enables me to contemplate God within the veil, for He has poured out for me the cup of beauty, and I have attained thereby to the station of Satisfaction, and have entered the spacious gardens of eternal joy. (Abu'l-Husayn al-Darraji)²⁰

Wajd is a mystery between the seeker and the Sought, which only a revelation can expound.... some declare that *wajd* is the glowing passion of lovers.... (Hujwiri)²¹

This is the great joy of his awakening, namely to know creatures in God, and not God in His creatures.... it is as

¹⁹ Margaret Smith: *The Sufi Path of Love*, p. 10.

²⁰ *al-Ghazali, the Mystic*, p. 89.

²¹ *Ibid.*

if God drew back some of the many veils and coverings that are before it so that it might see what He is; then, indeed,—but still obscurely, but still obscurely because all the veils are not drawn back, *that of faith remaining*,—the Divine face, full of grace, bursts through and shines. (St. John of the Cross: *The Living Flame of Love*, Stanza IV, line 1 ff. See also *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, II.26)

I think that if, at any time, the soul learns no *mysteries* during a rapture, it is no true rapture.... In genuine raptures I think God ravishes the soul wholly into Himself; as one who is His very own and His bride, and He shows her some small part of the kingdom she has won. (St. Teresa: *Interior Castle*, Sixth Mansion, ch. V, 12, 13)

6. In the condition described as *Haqiqat*, "truth," the Sufi reaches a state where the Divine nature of things is intuitively known.

To such a contemplative, the manifestation of the Eternal and Invisible God is made as clear as if seen with the eyes. The contemplative, when he reads the Word of God thinks not of himself, or what he reads, for in the word he sees the Speaker and in the words of His attributes.... he is absorbed in the contemplation of Him, to the exclusion of all else.... the mystery of the Unseen is revealed to him. The contemplation of the One Creative Truth is sometimes continuous and sometimes comes expectedly like a flash of lightning.... (Margaret Smith: *Al-Ghazali the Mystic*, pp. 171-2; based on al-Ghazali's *Ihya 'Ulum al-Din*, "Revivification of Religion")

This knowledge consists in a certain contact of the soul with the Divinity, and it is God Himself Who is then felt and tasted.... But this touch of knowledge of sweetness is so strong and so profound, that it penetrates into the inmost substance of the soul.... This knowledge savours, in some measure of the Divine essence and of everlasting life.... (*Ascent of Mount Carmel*, II.26.5)

7. The final stage is called *Wasl* or "union with God." Some writers distinguish this from *Fana*, a condition comparable to Nirvana in Buddhism; some unite the two. Some writers interpret *Fana* as the extinction of the individual life, not "annihilation." Goldziher represents it as the condition "When the consciousness of Ego and of all his belongings is absent".²²

Just as he who dies the death of the body loses all his qualities.... so in the spiritual death, all qualities.... are cut off and God comes into his place in all his states. Thus, instead of his own essence comes the essence of God, and in place of his attributes, come the attributes of God. He

²² *The Sufi Path of Love*, p. 9.

who knows himself sees his whole existence to be His existence.... For when thou "knowest thyself" thine egoism is taken away and thou knowest that thou are none other than God. (Ibn al-Arabi)²³

This is for the instruction of the truly spiritual man in the mystery of the gate and way of Christ, that he may become united with God, and also to teach him that the more he annihilates self for God, in sense and spirit, the more will he be united with God, and the greater the work he will accomplish. And when he shall have been brought to nothing, when his humility is perfect, then will take place the union of the soul and God.... (*Ascent of Mount Carmel*, II.8.9)

²³ *al-Ghazali, the Mystic*, p. 212.

VII.

Purgation — Illumination — Union ¹

You ought to know yourself as you really are, so that you may understand of what nature you are and whence you have come to this world, and for what purpose you were created, and in what your happiness and your misery consist, for within you are combined the qualities of animals and wild beasts and the angels, but the spirit is your real essence, and all beside it, is, in fact, foreign to you.... So, strive for the knowledge of your origin, so that you may know how to attain to the Divine Presence...and deliver yourself from the fetters of lust and passion. (al-Ghazali, *Kimiya al Sa'ada*, pp. 4, 5)²

Would that I could persuade spiritual persons that the way of God consisted not in the multiplicity of meditations, way of devotion or sweetness, though these may be necessary for beginners, but in one thing only, in knowledge how to deny themselves in earnest, inwardly and outwardly.... And if he be deficient in the exercise, which is the sum and root of all virtue, all he may do will be but beating the air; utterly profitless, notwithstanding great meditations and communications. There is no progress but in the following of Christ. (St. John of the Cross, *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, II. vii, 7)

Among the Christian and Muslim mystics, particularly, the ascent to God follows a well-defined path where the terminology applied to the various stages is very much alike. In the moral as contrasted with the mental development referred to in an earlier section, the states are labelled Purgation, Illumination, and Union. Dean Inge thinks that the terminology was taken over from the Greek Mystery teachings, "and I do not see that a Christian need feel any reluctance to make this admission."³ In the Mystery teaching, the scheme of ascent proceeded from *katharsis* (purification) to *muesis* or illumination, a higher degree of which was designated *epopteia* (contemplation) at which stage, as Proclus notes, the divine beings appeared to the candidate apparelled in light. The ultimate stage is described as *henosis* or *deification*, in which condition there is the sense of union with the Divine Self. It is highly probable, since this division was adopted by the Church Fathers and the Fathers of the Desert, that it served as a convenient set of moulds into which the early Sufis could pour their inward experiences. If the student will look for them, he will find similar symbols in Hinduism and Buddhism, all too often expanded and developed to describe the varied turnings of the way. In the Buddhist *Visuddhi Magga*, as an example, Buddhaghosha associates with the purgative state, the sevenfold category of Purity, and by way of describing advanced stages, adds The Three Marks, Three Contemplations, Ten Knowledges of Insight, The Three Emancipations, and Three

¹ See Appendix A for a detailed description of these states as given by an early English Mystic, Richard Rolle, a hermit of Wampole (died 1349).

² *Ibid.* p. 151.

³ Inge, *Christian Mysticism*, p. 355.

⁴ Aung, *Compendium of Philosophy*, pp. 210-212 ff. See also Charles Johnston, *The Crest Jewel of Wisdom*, p. xii and passim.

Channels of Emancipation.⁴ Thus, under one symbol or another, those who have experienced it describe the long process of character-building and self-transcendence whereby the soul detaches herself from her slavery to things of sense and of mind, and led on by love, attains to knowledge of His will and becomes united with Him. It is often pointed out that the interior states and the union, the latter especially, are possible because there is in our nature, "in the apex of our mind," that which is consubstantial with Deity. Such is the ground upon which all mysticism rests. It is the only assumption which makes "self-realization" meaningful and possible. "When I stand empty *in* God's will and empty of God's will," said Meister Eckhart, "and of all his works and of God himself, *then* am I above all creatures and am neither God nor creature, but I am what I was and evermore shall be."⁵ In language less philosophical and less "existential," St. Catherine of Siena hears the Lord tell her: "How glorious is that soul which has indeed been able to pass from the stormy ocean to Me, the Sea Pacific, and in that Sea, which is Myself, to fill the pitcher of her heart."⁶ "The Crest Jewel of Wisdom" or *Vivekachudamani*, attributed to Shankaracharya, observes that it is "Not by Yoga nor by Sankhya, not by works nor by knowledge, but only through awaking to the oneness of one's true Self with the Eternal, does liberation come, and in no other way."⁷

A. Purgation

The first step on this ascent that ultimately leads to union with God, the object of all desire, is a detaching of oneself from or a getting rid of all those elements in the personal life which are not in harmony with what one knows to be the true laws of life. In fact, in almost every one of the major religions of the world, there is emphasis on the idea that man's present life is an abnormal existence — he suffers because he is wrapped in illusion, he has become enslaved to sin and evil, he has "fallen" and become estranged from Divinity. More personally, man has become caught in the panic of life; he is smitten with the lust of sensation, and every sensual stimulus he gratifies leaves him weakened and nearer to spiritual death. As he turns toward the light, he discovers, as one writer puts it, that

we lived hitherto, and all who have not passed through the darkness still live, under the despotism of a tyrant, a false and demoniac self whom they take to be themselves. Possession by devils is no myth. You can see them recording themselves in human faces, everywhere throughout the world. Every self that believes itself separate is a devil, haunted by a curse of loneliness, and living only to flee from its pursuing doom. The horror of solitude brings the lust of sensation, and the desire of sensation dominates all human life Everyone carries the hungering and thirsting demon with him, and lives his life at his bidding, and we also have hitherto done the same. Yet such is Life's beneficence, that from every storm-tossed heart there gleams to us a starry ray of the soul.⁸

⁵ Meister Eckhart, *Sermons*, No. 37.

⁶ *The Divine Dialogue of St. Catherine of Siena*, ch. 69.

⁷ *Crest Jewel of Wisdom*, verse 48.

⁸ Charles Johnston, *The Song of Life*, (a commentary on *Brihad-Aranyaka Up.*, IV.3-4) N.Y., 1901, pp. 27-8.

In the conversion which marks the soul's awakening, the soul discovers the extent to which it is bound by the demon-self. It recognizes the difference between the dearer and the better, and struggles to emancipate itself from the pull from below. Asceticism, thus, is an indispensable part of the early stages of the spiritual ascent, — asceticism in the sense of a self-discipline whose purpose is not a torture and maltreatment of the body, as so often misunderstood, but a purification, a reclamation of life's energies from their enslavement to the usurpations of the daemonic self. Dean Inge summarizes the matter aptly when he says that "Mysticism enjoins a dying life, not a living death."⁹ "I die daily," said St. Paul, by which he meant the constant attempt to redeem the life hitherto usurped by "the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts." (Eph. 4:22) "Though the outward man perishes," he noted, "the inward man is renewed day by day" (II Cor. 4:16)—a process the reverse of that which takes place in the life of the unregenerate man. Al-Ghazali writes that originally the heart was created pure, that that purity has become defiled by foul deeds, and the fair countenance disfigured by the darkness of sin. Abu Talib, another Sufi, says that the "carnal self" is by nature prone to having its own will, so God afflicts it "in order that it may feel the need of its Lord and be cleansed from its own tendencies and desires."¹⁰ "Blessed is the man," says the *Holy Qur'an*, "who hath kept his soul pure, and undone is he that hath corrupted it." (Sura xci, 9, 10) The idea that the path of virtue is an arduous one, and requires constant effort and vigilance is emphasized also in Shankara's *Vivekachudamani*:

For living beings human birth is hard to gain, then manhood, then holiness; harder is perfection in the path of the law of wisdom; hardest to gain is illumination. Discernment between the Divine Self, and that which is not the Self, fully realized union with the Eternal Self, liberation—this is not to be attained without holiness perfected through a hundred myriad lives....

Gaining at length human life, hard to win, and manhood, and the understanding of the revealed teachings, he who strives not for liberation in the Divine Self, deluded in heart, self-destroying, slays himself through grasping at the unreal.... (2-4, Johnston's trans.)

The truth stated in the *Theologia Germanica* that "No man can be enlightened unless he be first cleansed and purified and stripped" (ch. xiv) expresses what is almost universally the first step in the Scale of Perfection. Evelyn Underhill, in her classic work on *Mysticism*, says that Purgation, which she calls "the re-making of character in conformity with perceived reality,"¹¹ consists of two essential acts: the cleansing of that which remains and the stripping of that which is to be done away. It is understandable, then, that all writers on Mysticism devote attention first to Negative Purgation or "self-stripping," and then to Positive Purgation, or the aligning of our wills to the Divine

⁹ Inge, op. cit. p. 11.

¹⁰ M. Smith, *Studies in Early Mysticism*, etc. p. 202.

¹¹ Underhill, *Mysticism*, pp. 247.

Will. Thus, while terminology varies with writers on the subject, *Poverty* and *Detachment* are the usual designations for the first; *Mortification* describes the asceticism and gymnastic exercises of the second.

Poverty and Detachment. The Evangelical counsels of Poverty, Chastity and Obedience are taken both for the Eastern and Western mystics in their literal and moral and spiritual senses. The Sufi gives up first what is superfluous and unnecessary, then what he esteems necessary, and finally all but God. The mendicant Buddhist Bhikshu and the Hindu Sannyasi have given up all that men hold dear to attain a spiritual ideal. St. Francis and his followers sought to attain the Pauline ideal of having nothing, yet possessing all things in the Lord. Poverty, then, means "an utter self-stripping, the casting off of immaterial as well as material wealth, a complete detachment from all finite things."¹² Chastity is a poverty of the senses, needed because fallen man has made a lust for every sense. It is needed by the aspirant to higher things because the temple in which the Lord comes to dwell must be swept clean. The Rhineland mystics—Meister Eckhart, Suso and Tauler—saw this moral and spiritual significance in the fact that in the Fourth Gospel Christ cleansed the Temple and drove out the money-changers at the *beginning* of his ministry. Obedience in its varied forms, is the negation of self-hood, a holy mortification which brings about complete humility. Of course, none of these evangelical counsels stands alone; they are intertwined. "God is pure God in himself," says Meister Eckhart, "therefore will He dwell nowhere but in a pure soul. There He can pour Himself out: into that He can wholly flow. What is Purity? It is that a man should have turned himself away from all creatures and have set his heart so entirely on the Pure Good that no creature is to him a comfort, that he has no desire for aught creaturely, save so far as he may apprehend therein the Pure Good which is God. And as little as the bright eye can endure aught foreign in it, so little can the pure soul bear anything in it, any strain in it, that comes between it and God. To it all creatures are pure to enjoy; for it enjoyeth all creatures in God, and God in all creatures."¹³ There have been mystics whose detachment from material things was really a hearty dread of them, but the Poverty of the ancient tradition, whether Eastern or Western, is based on the idea that only that is truly ours to which we are not bound either by possession or desire.

Those who are deluded by the Powers of Nature become attached to the works of the Powers . . . In Me, renouncing all works, through perception of oneness with the Oversoul, without expectation or sense of possession, fight thou, thy fever gone!

Therefore, detached, carry out ever the work that is to be done; for the man who accomplishes his work detached wins the supreme.

(*Bhagavad-Gita*, III, 29, 30, 20; Johnston's translation)

The Master puts himself after others, yet remains the first.

He is detached from his body, yet conserves his body.

Is it not because he has no desires for himself, that all his desires are fulfilled? (*Tao-Teh-King*, 8; Johnston's translation)

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Quoted by Underhill, op. cit. p. 247.

The poet of the Franciscan Order, Jacopone da Todi, wrote in one of his Odes that "Poverty is naught to have and nothing to desire; but all things to possess in the spirit of liberty." (*Lauda*, lix) It is the wise counsel, too, which comes from St. John of the Cross: "That thou mayest have pleasure in everything, seek pleasure in nothing. That thou mayest know everything, seek to know nothing. That thou mayest possess all things, seek to possess nothing . . . In detachment the spirit finds quiet and repose, for coveting nothing, nothing wearies it by elation; and nothing oppresses it by dejection, because it stands in the center of its own humility."¹⁴ Encountering passages of this kind was probably responsible for leading Dom John Chapman to feel, in his earlier years, that St. John of the Cross was too Buddhist in his thinking—a fact which he records somewhere in his *Spiritual Letters*. The Sufis, not less than the early Franciscans, practiced a complete renunciation of worldly goods, and it is of them that al-Ghazali says "Their science has for its object the uprooting of the soul from all violent passions, the extirpation from it of vicious desires, and evil qualities; so that the heart may become detached from all that is not God, and give itself for its only occupation meditation upon the Divine Being."¹⁵ It should be added that none of these men are speaking of detachment as being merely the *absence* of things, and St. John of the Cross is anxious not to be misunderstood. "For absence is not detachment if the desire remains—but (I am speaking) of that detachment which consists of suppressing desire and avoiding pleasure. It is this that sets the soul free, even though possession may still be retained."¹⁶

Poverty is the *self-less* as against the *selfish* use of things. Mortification takes its name from the fact that before things can be used selflessly, the body of desire, what *The Cloud of Unknowing* calls "lump of self,"¹⁷ must be put to death, by degrees, perhaps, but completely in the end. Many of the mystics and saints have discovered that when there is a conflict of interests, the lower self must go. "Who hinders thee," says Thomas à Kempis in the *Imitation of Christ*, "more than the unmortified affections of thy own heart? . . . if we were perfectly dead to ourselves and not entangled within our own breasts, then we should be able to taste Divine things and to have some experience of heavenly contemplation." (Bk. I, chs. 3 and 11) The dying has many degrees and so also the awakening to the new life. There is a seemingly endless battle against the vices, and also against the virtues as soon as these are outgrown and tend to become vices. Some Christian mystics, no less than their Eastern counterparts, have tortured the body to the point where the attempts to subject it to the authority of the inner man have only brought frustration. In his *Life*¹⁸ Henry Suso, the Rhineland

¹⁴ *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, I. 13.10.

¹⁵ Underhill, op. cit. p. 254.

¹⁶ *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, I.3.4.

¹⁷ See Ch. V, p. 55 in the edition published by Harper and Brothers, N. Y., 1948.

¹⁸ Henry Suso, *The Life of the Servant*, tr. by James M. Clark, London, James Clarke and Co. Ltd. 1952, ch. xviii.

mystic, says that after sixteen years of this martyrdom of the body, "On a certain Whitsun Day a heavenly messenger appeared to him, and ordered him, in God's name, to continue it no more. He at once ceased, and threw all the instruments of his sufferings (irons, nails, hairshirts, etc.) into a river."¹⁹ Along with these, there have been mystics like St. Francis de Sales, whose emphasis, almost Buddhistic, was the sweetly reasonable middle way.²⁰ But in whatever manner the warfare is carried on, the process of mortification is necessary not because the senses and the body are evil, but rather that the psychic life, seeking pleasure and satisfaction through the senses, has allowed these to become usurpers. In a sentence quoted by Miss Underhill, "the dogs have taken the children's meat"—or, "The senses have grown stronger than their masters, monopolized the field of perception, dominated an organism which was made for greater activities, and built up those barriers of individuality which must one and all be done away before the subject can fulfill its destiny"²¹ St. John of the Cross, with a detachment and renunciation remarkably Eastern, holds that

It is therefore supreme ignorance for any one to think that he can ever attain to the high estate of union with God before he casts from him the desire of natural things, and of supernatural also, so far as it concerns self-love, because the distance between them and that which takes place in the state of pure transformation in God is the very greatest . . . until the desires be lulled to sleep by the mortification of sensuality, and sensuality itself be mortified in them so that it shall be contrary to the spirit no more, the soul cannot go forth in perfect liberty to the fruition of the union with the Beloved.²²

Mortification, understandably, involves pain, for the lower self created by long habit does not die without struggle. One thinks of the torment and anguish welcomed with joy by St. Francis of Assisi, Suso, St. Catherine of Genoa, St. Ignatius de Loyola and many others. In a passage suggestive of St. Augustine, Mme. Guyon cries: "Thou wert so severe a taskmaster that Thou wouldst not let me pass over the smallest things. When I thought of doing anything, Thou didst stop me abruptly and madest me to do without thinking all Thy desires and all that was most repugnant to my senses until they were become so docile that they had no longer either desire or distaste for anything. I did nothing myself, but I let myself be led by my King, who ruled me absolutely in all things."²³ Many of the experiences of the Christian saints and mystics are easily duplicated by the comparable trials of their spiritual brethren, the Sufis. Said Jami, the Persian mystic: "God gives his servant no source of strength more powerful for him than when He leads him to humiliate himself." And when a friend wrote to the Egyptian, Dhu al-Nun al-Misri asking for his prayers that he might be relieved of his suffering, he got the reply: "You ask me to pray to God

¹⁹ From his *Life*, quoted by Dean Inge, *Christian Mysticism*, p. 176.

²⁰ C. F. Kelley, *The Spirit of Love*, p. 229 and passim.

²¹ *Mysticism*, p. 265.

²² *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, I.5.2.

²³ *Life and Letters of Mme. Guyon*, Pt. I. ch. x., quoted by Underhill, op. cit.

that he would remove grace from you. Know, O my brother, that the Sufis desire fellowship with sickness and misfortune, and keep company with anxiety and weakness, for such things in their life lead to healing. He who does not reckon affliction as a grace is not one of the wise, and he who has not entrusted himself to the All-Compassionate, has confided his affairs to people who cannot be trusted."²⁴ Suffering, as the Eternal Wisdom told Suso, is the ancient law of love—the Love that breaks what it cannot bend.

B. *Illumination*

There is no question that many of the aspirants to the holy life have become so entrapped in their system of mortification, that they have made the mortification and torment of the flesh the end-all of their striving. It is these who have given the word "asceticism" a masochistic meaning. But among the mystics, purification, whether of the moral or intellectual powers, is the first step in the ascent, and though the martyrdom of the body may last sixteen years as it did with Suso, there is a point reached where the heavenly messenger comes to bring light or the message to come up higher. All too often, though, the illumination comes intermittently, with occasional flashes in the midst of the turbulence brought on by the struggle with the passional life, or to bring some light during the Dark Night of the soul's early indrawal.

Those who have attained to the stage of illumination vouch for it that the title designates a real state of development. They have entered into a radiant world; repeatedly they resort to a light-imagery in describing their state of consciousness. Christian and Sufi mystics are on the same ground here, and their experiences are vivid corroborations of the truth recorded by Proclus the Neoplatonist that at a certain stage of spiritual development those being initiated in the Eleusinian mysteries saw the gods in forms of light. "...light without measure shines in my heart," sang Jacopone da Todi, the poet of the Franciscan Order. It is "the flowing light of the Godhead" which St. Mechthild of Magdeburg mentions, "the Living Light" which spoke to St. Hildegarde in her revelations—a light which she describes as more brilliant than the brightness around the sun. St. Teresa described it as "an infused brightness; a light which knows no night, but rather, as it is always light, nothing ever disturbs it."²⁵ Dante thus invokes it:

O grace abounding wherein I presumed to fix my gaze on the eternal light

In its depths I saw ingathered the scattered leaves of the universe,
bound into one book by love

O Light Eternal, Who only in Thyself abidest, only Thyself dost comprehend, and, of Thyself comprehended and Thyself comprehending, dost love and smile!²⁶

²⁴ M. Smith, *Studies in Early Mysticism*, etc. p. 194.

²⁵ St. Theresa, *Life*, xxviii. 7,8.

²⁶ *Paradiso*, xxxiii, 82, 121.

Something of the same all-inclusive and all-revealing power which this illumination reveals, is to be found in the utterances of many of the mystics—in that way leaving us the impression that it is characteristic of a common experience. The statement about the synthesizing unity is virtually the same in the writings of such otherwise totally different temperaments as those of St. Augustine, Angela of Foligno and Jacob Boehme. In his *Confessions*, St. Augustine writes:

I entered into the secret closet of my soul, led by Thee . . . I entered and beheld with the mysterious eye of my soul the Light that never changes, above the eye of my soul, above my intelligence. It was not that common light which all flesh can see, nor was it greater yet of the same kind, as if the light of day were to grow brighter and brighter and flood all space. It was . . . altogether different from such things. Nor was it above my intelligence as oil is above water, or heaven is above earth, but it was higher because it made me, and I was lower because made by it. He who knoweth the truth knoweth that Light, and who knoweth it, knoweth eternity. Love knoweth it. (VII.x)

There is a very powerful passage from the book of the "Revelations" of the Blessed Angela of Foligno:

The eyes of my soul were opened, and I beheld the plentitude of God, whereby I did comprehend the whole world, both here and beyond the sea, and the Abyss and all things else; and therein did I behold naught save the divine power in a manner assuredly indescribable, so that through excess of marveling the soul cried in a loud voice, saying "This whole world is full of God!" . . . I saw, moreover, that the power of God was above all things, and that the whole world was filled with it²⁷

In the account of the life of Jacob Boehme we read how that there were three distinct breaks-through, when the within was as the without and the without as the within. In the first illumination which took place when he was very young, it is said that he was "surrounded by a divine light for seven days, and stood in the highest contemplation and the Kingdom of Joy." Another illumination came during his twenty-fifth year, brought on, he said, by gazing at a polished disc. This was a lucid vision of the inward archetypes of physical things, "when he looked at the deepest foundation of things" and saw their correspondences and spiritual relationships. "He believed that it was only a fancy, and in order to banish it from his mind he went out upon the green. But here he remarked that he gazed into the very heart of things, the very herbs and grass, and that actual Nature harmonized with what he had inwardly seen."²⁸ Boehme was "drunk with the vision" says Dr. Martensen, and the episode marked a crisis in his inner life.

In this my earnest Christian seeking and Desire . . . the Gate was opened to me, that in One Quarter of an Hour I saw and knew more than if I had been many years together at an University, at which

²⁷ *Book of Divine Consolations of the Blessed Angela of Foligno*, trans. by M. Steegman, London, 1908, p. 172.

²⁸ H. L. Martensen, *Jacob Boehme*, His Life and Teaching, London, 1885, p. 7. A new and revised edition of Bishop Martensen's work was edited by Stephen Hobhouse, New York, Harper and Brothers, 1949.

I exceedingly admired and praised God for it. For I saw and knew the Being of all Beings, the Byss and Abyss, and the Eternal Generation of the Holy Trinity, the Descent and Original of the World and of all creatures through the Divine Wisdom; knew and saw in myself all the three World's, namely, the Divine, angelical; and the Dark World, the Original of Nature to the Fire; and then thirdly, the external and visible world, being a Procreation or external Birth from both the internal and spiritual Worlds....²⁹

There is one more of these amazing illuminations, dealing with the same kind of break-through and the same vision of the "doctrine of signatures" and archetypal relation of all things. This time it is from the experience of George Fox, the founder of the Society of Friends. There is this record in the *Journal*:

Now I was come up in spirit through the flaming sword into the Paradise of God. All things were new: and all the creation gave another smell unto me than before, beyond what words can utter.... The creation was opened to me; and it was showed me how all things had their names given them, according to their nature and virtue. And I was at a stand in my mind whether I should practice physic for the good of mankind, seeing the nature and virtue of the creatures were so opened to me by the Lord.... Great things did the Lord lead me unto, and wonderful depths were opened unto me, beyond what can by words be declared; but as people come into subjection to the Spirit of God, and grow up in the image and power of the Almighty, they may receive the word of wisdom that opens all things, and come to know the *hidden* unity in the *Eternal Being*.³⁰

This vision of all creatures in God and God in all creatures, is a frequent subject of the illumination of the ecstatic, or the one who has been carried into a state of being above his ordinary consciousness. One thinks of the theophanies of the prophets of the Old Testament—Isaiah and Jeremiah and Ezekiel—who were frequently "in the spirit" and saw visions of that "new" world forever hidden from the sight of unopened eyes. One is reminded, too, of the passage in the *Bhagavad-Gita* where Arjuna's eyes are opened and where he exclaims:

I behold the gods in Thy body, O divine One! and all the hosts of diverse beings; Brahma, the Creator, seated on the lotus throne, and all the Seers and Serpents of Wisdom....

Thou art to be known as the supreme Everlasting; Thou art the supreme treasure of the universe; Thou art the eternal guardian of the immemorial Law, I esteem Thee to be the everlasting Spirit....

Without beginning, middle or end, of endless valor, mighty-armed, Whose eyes are the sun and moon; I behold Thee of countenance like flaming fire, illuminating all the universe by Thy light.

(XI, 15, 18, 19)

Among the Sufis, *hal*, ecstasy, is spoken of as descending upon the purified consciousness and adorning it, "as the spirit adorns the body." Ecstasy, corresponding to the illumination discussed above, is the second of the stages of the advance to God. *Hal* is a term frequently used in

²⁹ op. cit. p. xv.

³⁰ George Fox, *An Autobiography*, edited by Rufus M. Jones, Philadelphia: Ferris and Leach, 1906, vol. I, ch. 2, p. 97.

an analogical sense, never with the elaborate descriptions of the visions enjoyed "in the spirit" by mystics of other lands. Among the Persian mystics, such as al-Ghazali and al-Hujwiri (died 1078) the possessor of *hal* does not speak of his attainment, but his actions speak of its reality. More important is the fact that the possessor of *hal* has reached such a state of intuitive certainty that he is not subject to the vacillations of his lower, psychic nature—"he is always in the place of actual vision."³¹

Of course the nature of the ecstasy and the penetration of the illumination varies with the individual who experiences it. Father Poulain points out that the various Christian mystics use a diverse and often confusing reference to it. St. Teresa describes it under the name of the *fourth water* (*Life*, ch. 18 ff). Probably because of the corrupted meaning of the word in her day and because she was eager to avoid misunderstanding, she does not use the term ecstasy and she often employs the word union. Her description of the experience, however, shows that it is ecstasy, for there is, as she says, "an alienation of the sensible faculties." Writers earlier than St. Teresa and also contemporary refer to ecstasy as "elevation of the spirit" or "flight of the spirit" (*excessus mentis*). Here are some characteristics of the experience which are generally attested: It is called

- First Degree or *simple ecstasy* if it comes on gently, little by little, or if it is not of great strength and does not contain revelations;
- Second Degree or *rapture*, when it is sudden and violent;
- Third Degree or *flight of the spirit*, when, as St. Teresa says, "the soul suddenly feels a rapid sense of motion that appears to hurry it away." "I cannot say whether the soul dwells in the body meanwhile; I will neither affirm that it does, nor that the body is deprived of the spirit." (*Interior Castle*, Sixth Mansion, ch. v, 1 and 10.)

It is understandable that the nature of the ecstatic onslaught, its duration, and the nature of the accompanying revelations or intuitive visions would vary with the temperament and state of advancement of those who experienced them. St. Teresa has much to say about these special features, observing that,

1. These raptures are "very alarming, especially at first";
2. The violent motion cannot, as a rule, be resisted;
3. The body "continues in the position that it was in when the rapture came upon it";
4. God nearly always reveals *secrets* of the supernatural order in raptures and as a rule it is felt that the understanding has been amplified;
5. There may be difficulty resuming the ordinary exterior occupations and this sometimes continues for several days. (This is far from general, however, for certain of the ecstasies, such as

³¹ Smith: *al-Ghazali, the Mystic*, p. 130, ff.

St. Francis of Assisi and St. Rose of Lima have made an easy transition and identified themselves at once with their duties to the world of men and nature);

6. In larger part the mystics report that the memory of what is seen is retained, though the soul may not have adequate human language to express itself;
7. When the soul comes out of a rapture that has overtaken her in the middle of a conversation or prayer, it often happens that she will continue a phrase where it was broken off. It is related in the *Life* of the Ven. Jeanne of the Cross of the Order of Poor Clares of Rovaredo, that as she was speaking of the divine perfections, she fell into a rapture that lasted seven hours. When she came out of it, she "took up the thread of her discourse at the point where she had interrupted it";
8. Some saints used to utter cries when the rapture seized them, as in the case of St. Peter of Alcantara and St. Joseph of Cupertino. The latter declared that his cry was "a simple outburst of love." At the end of her raptures, St. Frances of Rome often uttered moans. These were caused by the violent sufferings experienced when obliged to tear herself from the celestial vision.³²

Dr. Imbert³³ has compiled a table of the ages at which the prominent Christian mystics became ecstasies: St. Hildegard and St. Catherine of Siena at the age of 4; St. Peter of Alcántara at 6; and St. Teresa of Ávila at 43. Similar tabulations might be made for Hindu, Buddhist and Sufi ecstasies. Father Poulain believes that it is the exception when the ecstasies do not last as long as one half hour. There is the case of St. Thomas of Villanova, who when reading the Office for Ascension Day was seized by an ecstasy and remained suspended in the air for twelve hours. Angela of Foligno, and St. Catherine of Siena experienced ecstasies lasting three days; one of eight days is recorded of St. Ignatius de Loyola.³⁴

C. *Union*

In the stage of illumination or divine enlightenment, however glowingly described, the individuality of the subject retains its sense of self-identification and separateness. Of this state, as one would expect, there are different degrees, some at a low level, some so transcendent as to border on union. In fact, in both the Sufis and Christian mystics there are recorded episodes of what seem to be temporary union, where the consciousness of separateness is lost. The Muslim Abu Talib describes *uns* as a state of proximity through the unveiling of God's presence. Al-Hujwiri, the Persian, says that "A servant of God, seeing His favour, cannot fail to love Him, and when he has loved, he will become intimate, because awe of one's beloved is estrangement, whereas intimacy is oneness"³⁵ Rabia of Basra, undoubtedly the greatest of the women

³² Poulain, *The Graces of Interior Prayer*, pp. 244-5.

³³ *Ibid.* pp. 245-6.

³⁴ *Ibid.* p. 246.

³⁵ Margaret Smith, *Rabia the Mystic and her Fellow Saints in Islam*, Cambridge University Press, 1928, p. 91.

saints of Islam, reached a state of interior awakening where she was able to say, "I have ceased to exist and have passed out of self. I am become one with Him and am altogether His."³⁶ Like the "entering into eternal life" or the attainment of Nirvana, this is a state known and experienced in this lifetime.

Ecstasy, it has been observed, has various degrees. Its onslaught is marked in different ways and undoubtedly connected with the temperament and advancement of the individual. St. Teresa of Ávila, whose terminology on the states reached lacks precision and is not always consistent, distinguished incomplete union from full union, "the prayer of union." By this last she seemed to mean union of such strength that the soul is *fully* occupied with the divine object. This union, however intensive or extensive may be its meaning in the individual mystics, is basically an experiential or "experimental *possession* of God."³⁷

The nature of this transcendental experience, thus, is described in varied language and metaphor, taxing the many colorful figures of speech in which the different languages abound. But the most consistent analogy is that of the union of two lovers, or of the joy which comes when the lover loses himself in the Beloved. "Orison draws the great God down into the small heart;" says Mechthild of Magdeburg, "it drives the hungry soul out to the full God. It brings together the two lovers, God and the soul, into a joyful room where they speak much of love."³⁸ This involves "death" or "annihilation" for one aspect of our nature and life to the other. "Die! Die! as the silkworm does when it has fulfilled the office of its creation, and you will *see* God and be immersed in His greatness, as the little silkworm is enveloped in its cocoon...." (St. Teresa, *Interior Castle*, VI, ch. ii.5.) Again, "God, then (when He raises it to the union) deprives the soul of all its senses that He may the better imprint in it true wisdom; it neither sees, hears nor understands while that state lasts, which is never more than a brief time; it appears to be much shorter to the soul than it really is." (*Ibid.*, V., ch. i.8) Suso, describes the experience in this manner: "This highest state of union is an indescribable experience, in which all idea of images and forms and differences has vanished. All consciousness of self and of all things has gone, and the soul has plunged into the abyss the Godhead, and the spirit has become one with God.... As the drop of water loses its identity and takes on the taste and colour of the wine, so it is with those who are in full possession of bliss; human desires influence them no longer; divested of self, they are absorbed in the Divine Will, mingled with the Divine Will and become one with it."³⁹ "My hope is for union with Thee," cried Rabia of Basra, "for that is the goal of my desire." Later she wrote to Hasan of Basra, "I have ceased to exist and passed out of self. I am become one with Him and am altogether

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 110.

³⁷ Poulain, op. cit. p. 66.

³⁸ *The Flowing Light of the Godhead*, V. 13. Quoted by Underhill, *Mysticism*, p. 410.

³⁹ Quoted in *Rabia the Mystic etc.*, p. 109-110.

His."⁴⁰ Professor R. A. Nicholson, speaks of this *tawhid* or *unification* among the Sufis as "the absoluteness of the Divine nature realised in the passing away of the human nature," so that "man's last state reverts to his first state, and he becomes even as he was before he existed."⁴¹

The way to this final, transforming union, is the way of love. It is Love that calls us and by love that we respond. A typical theme in the Sufi writings is that of the lover and the Beloved. In the sixth chapter of the *Cloud of Unknowing*, the fourteenth century devotional classic whose author is still undiscovered, we are told that it is by love that God may be gotten and held in our life, never by thought. We are advised to "Go up towards that thick Cloud of Unknowing, with a sharp dart of longing love...." This is the spirit of contemplatives such as John of Ruysbroeck and Mother Juliana of Norwich, of Rabia of Basra and the Bhaktas of Hinduism.

Among the Sufis, references to the "mystical marriage" of the soul with God are rare, though the phrase about the union of the lover with the Beloved is frequent. Among the Christian mystics, it is likely, as many contend, that the imagery of the Song of Songs provided the pattern of many of their references. Still, the imagery would not have been adequate, did not every cloistered nun look upon herself as the bride of Christ. Progress on the mystic way became for many of them rightly identified with the symbolism of marriage. In a daring imagery, Richard of St. Victor applies the symbolism of marriage to the adventures of the spirit of man. The steep stairway of love he divides into four gradations to which he gives the suggestive names of the betrothal, the marriage, the wedlock and the fruitfulness of the soul.⁴² It remained for the women mystics of the Church—St. Catherine of Siena and St. Teresa of Avila, especially,—to carry this imagery to the point where the Divine Bridegroom did descend from above to transform their lives so that they could say as did St. Paul, I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me.

Mysticism, in the various religions, is designated as the science of divine love. The quintessence of this science is the "spiritual marriage," the rapturous union of the soul with its Creator not as an after-death reward for an ethically righteous life lived on earth, but as an experience to be known during one's lifetime, here and now. It is the "reward," using that word with many qualifications, for the soul's response to the call from above and for the desire which the Beloved has to be united to the soul of its beloved. All description baffles the understanding. These are called the "Divine espousals" among some of the Christian mystics, as in the case of St. Catherine of Siena, who, on the last day of the Carnival, A.D. 1366 heard the Lord say to her, "I will this day

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 110.

⁴¹ Margaret Smith, *The Sufi Path of Love*, London, Luzac and Co., Ltd. 1954, p. 18.

⁴² Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism*, p. 165.

celebrate solemnly with thee the feast of the betrothal of thy soul, even as I promised to espouse thee to Myself in faith."⁴³ Among mystical writers, the term *deification*, which sometimes is to be taken as "becoming like God" and at other times "becoming God," is used. It is an attempt to describe the transmutation of the self in God, and lacks the color and vividness of the experience of the soul which is afire with love. A study of the various mystics shows that there is a *degree* of difference, all too often, in the experience they describe. Meister Eckhart states the matter from a point of view intellectually abstract and almost Vedantin: that we can only become what we really are; that in knowing or becoming God it is as if the exile returned home and claimed his own. "If I am to know God directly, I must become completely He and He I: so that this He and this I become and are one I."⁴⁴ Such a statement, of course, might easily be duplicated from any of the Sufi mystics. Jami says:

All that is not One must ever
Suffer with the wound of Absence,
And whoever in Love's city
Enters, finds but room for One,
And but in One-ness, Union.⁴⁵

The Mirror for Simple Souls, the work of an unknown French ecstatic records this deification in a daring passage: "I am God, says Love, for Love is God and God is Love. And this soul is God by her condition of love: but I am God by my Nature Divine. And this state is hers by the justice of love. So that this precious one loved of Me, is taught and is led of Me out of herself . . ."⁴⁶ The Rhineland mystics generally—Eckhart and Suso and Tauler—say boldly that we can become united to the Creator only because we are of its nature and substance. We *are* God, and in "returning" to God we but cast off our illusion. Certain of the contemplatives, as John of Ruysbroeck, for example, seem unduly cautious and guarded concerning this transcendent experience,—as if it were a presumption to say that man was one with God. In reading Ruysbroeck's *The Book of Truth* (ch. xii), though, one is impressed with the fact that except for a few theological twists, he is saying nothing different than the other great contemplatives. His conservatism of expression may be explained by the later chapter (xiv) wherein he makes it clear that "he submits all that he has written to the judgment of Holy Church." Yet, when drawn and inspired by the Lord of Love, no attempt at aloofness, no hovering close and retaining a separate identity seems to suffice. The Sufi, Abdullah Ansari of Herat pleaded:

A beggar, Lord, I ask of Thee,
More than a thousand kings could ask.
Each one wants something that he asks of Thee.
I come to ask Thee to give me Thyself.⁴⁷

⁴³ Edmund Gardner, *St. Catherine of Siena*, London, 1907, p. 25.

⁴⁴ Sermon 99.

⁴⁵ *The Persian Mystics: Jami*, tr. by F. Hadland Davis, Lahore, Pakistan, n.d. p. 44.

⁴⁶ *Mirror of Simple Souls*, quoted by Underhill, *Mysticism*, p. 510.

⁴⁷ *The Invocations of Sheikh 'Abdullah Ansari of Herat*, A.D. 1005-1090, tr. by Sir Jogendra Singh. London, John Murray, 1951, p. 31.

Such boldness is matched by St. Catherine of Siena:—"She cried to God because He gave her so many consolations: 'I desire not that which comes forth from Thee; but only I desire Thee, O sweetest Love!'"⁴⁸

One may look upon the final stage of the soul's ascent as a union with a higher Life, or even as the entrance into a state of consciousness far transcending the normal condition of the rational human being. The descriptions given by some of the great western contemplatives are echoes of the attainments of the bodhisattvas of Mahayana Buddhism who have reached the threshold of pure bliss. Whoever has attained this transcendent consciousness has opened a door which no man can shut. It is characteristic of these great mystics, not that they have isolated themselves from suffering humanity, as ordinarily thought, but they have returned to the world, each in his calling, consciously to do the will of the Lord or the transcendent Self. Some of the Sufis, as the mystics of other lands, have by their lives and public teaching borne witness to the reality of the Beloved. In Christianity individuals like St. Francis of Assisi, St. Teresa of Ávila, St. John of the Cross and St. Ignatius Loyola founded or reformed monastic orders. St. Catherine of Siena, directly guided by her Lord, brought directed messages to Popes and kings. Like Rabia of Basra, each of these claimed union with the Lord by love and by will. It seems to be usually the case that the greater the saint or the mystic the more he approaches the bodhisattva of Northern Buddhism, who renounces the world of bliss to come back to the world to aid blinded and suffering mankind.

Sympathetic writers on mysticism—Evelyn Underhill, Dean Inge, Rudolf Otto—pay glowing tribute to the intense "practicality" of many of the so-called "theopathic" mystics, those men and women who knew and experienced, even while in the flesh, the visitations of the Lord. The results of the efforts of these extra-ordinary men and women to change the wills of men into harmony with their Master's will, is more or less evident for all to see. To understand their efforts in the light of the interior illumination that was vouchsafed them, one would have to know the inward life of these giants of the spiritual world.

⁴⁸ Quoted by Underhill, *op. cit.*, p. 298.

VIII.

Union with the Master, with the Beloved, the One God or Some Aspect of Divinity

Of such strength is this holy love that only in such union does man dwell with Thee upon earth, speaking and treating with Thy Divine Majesty, but also is he united with the Beloved.... Man, who was human, is raised by Thee to be Divine; yea, Thou dost raise him to Thy glory and immortality and transform him into Thyself. Diego de Estella¹

All things are created by the OM;

The love-form is His body.

He is without form, without quality, without decay;

Seek thou union with Him!

But that formless God takes a thousand forms in the eyes of his creatures....

He is immersed in all consciousness, all joy, all sorrows.

Songs of Kabir, II.75

To give different names to Reality leads many to see only difference and unlikeness; discrimination is needed to detect the unity which is basic to the variety. In the study of mystical states, for example, while some have noticed only the distinctions which set apart the English from the French and the Spanish and German schools, there have been others who have seen an underlying truth and a uniform pattern of development. The experiential truths of religion, they have contended, have the same meaning because they rest on truths and laws of life which are open to all for verification. "Seek as we have sought," Dean Inge quotes one of the mystics as saying, "and you will see as we have seen." If one institutes the conditions, the same results will follow, even if the terminology differs. The Dean adds that in general, "their accounts of their journey up the hill of the Lord agree very closely."² Guy Bowden, the Canon of Truro, after studying the methods of interior prayer, came to the same conclusion: "Indeed, one of the most impressive facts about mysticism is that mystics of whatever period or race all seem to be struggling to describe in their different ways, what is at bottom essentially the same experience."³ Professor Afifi of the University of Alexandria, Egypt, summarizing the position of the Moslem mystics in Morgna's *Islam, the Straight Path*, concludes that

With Muslim mysticism we see the climax of the development of the religious life and teaching in Islam. Neither the philosophers nor the theologians nor the canon lawyers have contributed so much as the mystics, toward deepening the meaning of their religion and enriching its teachings. It is due to them that Islam, in the way they understand it, can be compared with the other religions of the world, for mysticism is the only ground on which the great religions can meet.⁴

¹ Quoted by E. Allison Peers, *The Spanish Mystics*, London, Sheldon Press, 1930, vol. II, pp. 244-5.

² *Christian Mysticism*, p. vii.

³ Guy Bowden, *The Dazzling Darkness*, An Essay on the Experience of Prayer, London, Longmans Green and Co., 1950, p. 5.

⁴ Kenneth Morgan, editor, *Islam, the Straight Path*, N. Y. Ronald Press Co., 1958, p. 167.

Professor Philip Ashby of Princeton, though, in his *The Conflict of Religions*, sees the several world religions as approaching "fundamental theoretical problems" from perspectives that are unique and peculiar to each religion. He finds mysticism a factor present in each religion, and says it gives evidence of being a cross-influence between the religions, having adapted itself to each particular religion in such a way that the greatest figures in the history of these religions were mystics. Is mysticism the common ground of these religions in the sense that the mystic is the discoverer of the laws of life which are universal, and that he enters into a world of spirit which any may enter, regardless of race and creed and birth, if he but fulfill its conditions? Professor Ashby thinks not. Though many of the mystics, Hindu, Buddhist, Sufi and Christian, speak as if in the love and knowledge of God they had transcended their own cult and creed, Dr. Ashby and other writers hold that mysticism, in each religion, is to be understood only "in its relationship to the fundamental propositions of the religion of which it is a part."⁵ Though mysticism is called by the mystics themselves an experiential possession of God and the fruit of all religious striving and aspiration, Professor Ashby believes that it is a phenomenon superimposed upon a religion rather than an essential knowledge. St. John of the Cross and Meister Eckhart were Christians first and then mystics, he says; al-Hallaj and Rabia were Muslims first, and so, too, Shankara and Ramakrishna and the Zen Masters were Hindus and Buddhist first.

This evaluation would be worth holding were it not contradicted by the words of the very individuals mentioned, each one of whom rose above the creeds and tenets of his religion into the clear life and light which shines through all creeds alike. Rudolph Otto points out at the end of his *Mysticism East and West*, that a study of the various types of mysticism will reveal a whole series of analogies between experiences of very different content. However, "there is no doubt that the *mystic* himself would declare such explanations unsatisfactory. Where we see mere connection and relationships of affinity, he sees actual identity, where we make psychological assertions, he makes theological, where we talk about religion, he speaks from religious experience."⁶ One supposes that this would explain why Dr. Suzuki finds common ground between Meister Eckhart's teachings and those of the Zen Masters,⁷ or why Dr. Coomaraswamy could find so many striking parallels between the utterances of the Rhineland mystics and St. Thomas and those of the Vedas and the Upanishads. They spoke of the same enlightenment and the same wisdom, in some cases from the same level of penetration, in others so deep and unintelligible to the ordinary understanding, that it had to be set forth in a figure of speech.

⁵ Philip H. Ashby, *The Conflict of Religions*, N. Y. Charles Scribner's Sons, 1955, p. 199.

⁶ Rudolph Otto, *Mysticism East and West*, N. Y. Meridian Books, 1957, p. 262.

⁷ D. T. Suzuki, *Mysticism, Christian and Buddhist*, N. Y. Harper and Bros., 1957, passim.

Thus the truth would seem to be that each of the mystics—not the analyst and “describer” of the mystic states—gives language-garments to the Reality which is the source of his aspiration and inspiration. There is to be taken into account, too, the intelligence of those to whom the experience is communicated. The judgment might be hazarded that the more advanced the penetration of the mystic, the less limited he is by the cultural circumstances. He speaks the language of the day, but his primary appeal is to an experience that all may have. A Zen Buddhist like Dr. Suzuki is impressed by the Mahayanist spirit of Meister Eckhart because that fourteenth century Christian mystic can transcend symbols and like the Zen student appeal to meditation and the fruit of experience. For example, a pupil asked Meister Eckhart, “What are angels?” The Master answered:

“Go hence and withdraw into thyself until thou understandest; give thy whole self up to it, then look, refusing to see anything but what thou findest there. It will seem to thee at first as though thou art the angels with them, and as thou dost surrender to their collective being, thou shalt think thyself the angels as a whole, with the whole company of angels.”

The pupil went away and withdrew into himself until he found all this in truth in his own ground. Then, returning to his master he gave him thanks and said: “It was as you foretold. On giving my whole mind to the subject of the angels and aspiring to their estate, at first it seemed to me that I was all the angels with the angels.”⁸

Had Eckhart been a Zen Master, his method of instruction would have involved some *koan*, but it would have centered about the same principle: meditate upon what you want to know, “withdraw into thyself until thou understandest,” clothe your meditation in whatever symbols you wish, but whatever you wish to know is not yours until you have made it your own by reflection and assimilation. Dr. Coomaraswamy pointed out that there was a time, especially considering the philosophical depth of Eckhart and St. Thomas Aquinas, “when Europe and Asia could and did actually understand each other very well.” Dr. Coomaraswamy’s approach to the matter is primarily from the standpoint of an aesthetic philosophy, but he shows that the laws of one art merely translate those of another: “the formal element in art represents a purely mental activity The maker of an icon, having by various means proper to the practice of yoga eliminated the distracting influences of fugitive emotions and creature images, self-willing and self-thinking, proceeds to visualize the form of the *devata*, angel, or aspect of God” as described in some invocation or meditation “the imager must realize a complete self-identification with it,” and from that interior knowledge of it proceed to the execution in stone, pigment or other material. “. . . . in any case, the principle involved is that true knowledge of an object is not involved by merely empirical observation but only when the knower and known, seer and seen, meet in an act

⁸ Quoted by Otto, op. cit. p. 260-61.

transcending distinction.”⁹ To worship any angel, he adds, one must in truth become the angel. Here the experience of Meister Eckhart and the Zen Masters meets with that of the seers of the Upanishads: “whoever worships a divinity as other than self, thinking ‘He is one and I another,’ knows not.”¹⁰ Both Oriental and mediaeval Christian artists would have understood Eckhart’s axiom that the skilled painter *shows* his art; it is not himself that it reveals to us. Dr. Coomaraswamy’s conclusion is pointed and appropriate:

Eckhart represents an astonishingly close parallel to Indian modes of thought; some whole passages and many single sentences read like a direct translation from the Sanskrit.... It is not of course suggested that any Indian elements whatever are actually present in Eckhart’s writing, though there are some Oriental factors in European tradition derived from Platonic and Arabic sources. But what is proved by analogies is not the influence of one system of thought upon another, but the coherence of the metaphysical tradition in the world and at all times.¹¹

Two things are involved in a proper understanding of the subject: the power and practice of intuitive identification and the expression of that higher knowledge which all too often is limited by the cultural conditions in the midst of which the mystic or the artist is born. The reason why the true mystics can understand each other is that their knowledge of life and love transcends the limitation of language and culture, and the greater the degree of transcendence, the greater the degree of closeness. The position of the mystic on this point has never been made more clear than by the *bhaktas*, whether of the East or of the West, those who have sought to approach God or the Master or the Great Lover through what they speak of as the “religion of love.” While it is true that each poured that love into moulds and patterns provided by his culture and conditions, it is even more true that many of these lovers of God recognized how Love transcends the limitations of time and form, and that it is this very love which brings all men to consciousness of God. “Beloved,” wrote the Johannine mystic, “let us love one another; for love is of God; and everyone that loveth is born of God and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love.” (I Jn. 4:7-8) The Sufi, Ibn Arabi, a pupil of al-Ghazali, thus phrases his outlook:

My heart has become a receptacle of every form;
It is a pasture for gazelles and a convent for Christian monks,
And a temple for idols and the pilgrim’s Ka’aba,
And the tablets of the Torah and the Book of the Qur’an.
I follow the religion of love, whichever way its camels take;
For this is my religion and my faith.¹²

There is nothing more individual to each soul, wrote the Abbé de Tourville, “than the form of its intimacy with our Lord,” but also is it true

⁹ A. Coomaraswamy, *The Transformation of Nature in Art*, N. Y. Dover Publications, 1956, p. 6.

¹⁰ *Bṛhad Aranyaka Upanishad*, I.4.10.

¹¹ Coomaraswamy, *op. cit.* pp. 201-2.

¹² Quoted in *The Legacy of Islam*, edited by Sir Thomas Arnold, N. Y. Oxford University Press, 1931, p. 226.

that there is nothing more revealing of the Lord than the fact that He transcends the forms by which the worshipper limits him. In one of the great Upanishads there is this passage:

"How many gods are there really, O Yajnavalkya?" "One," he said. "Now answer us a further question: Agni, Aditya, Kala, Anna, Brahma, Rudra, Vishnu, thus do some meditate on Him, some on another; say, which of these is best for us?" And he said to them, "These are the chief manifestations of the highest, the immortal, the incorporeal Brahman . . . Brahman is indeed all this, and a man may meditate on, worship or discard, also those which are its manifestations."¹³

In one of the minor tractates, *Liber Positionum*, Meister Eckhart is giving some final advice to intimate friends. He said to them:

"In whatever way you find God best and are most aware of him, that way pursue. Should another way appear, quite different from the first, you will do right in quitting that to close with God in this one which appears as in the forsworn. It is a counsel of perfection in this manner to attain to such a final certainty and peace that we are able to enjoy him in any guise and in anything without having to stop and look for him at all: a boon accorded me."¹⁴

That the Divine is formless but given form by the mind of the worshipper is also the intention of this prayer, attributed to the great South Indian mystic, Shankaracharya:

O Lord, pardon my three sins.
I have in contemplation clothed in form Thee who art formless.
I have in praise described Thee who art ineffable.
And in visiting temples, I have ignored Thine omnipresence.

What the mystic makes clear to us is that beneath the veils of diverse symbolism and adapted metaphors, the same Reality is being referred to. Wrote Jami, the Persian Sufi:

Each speck of matter did He constitute
A mirror, causing each one to reflect
The beauty of His visage . . .
His Beauty everywhere doth show itself,
And through the forms of earthly beauties shines
Obscured as through a veil—
Where'er thou seest a veil,
Beneath that veil He hides. (tr. by E. G. Browne)

It is to be expected that the Divine Essence which is real to each individual is bound to vary in the expression by which it is made known to others. The entire weight of a life's tradition, the teachings and beliefs which have been made one's own, the subtle influences of character and temperament will all play their part in the coloring. Even the symbols and allegories involved in the labored attempts to describe the ineffable will inevitably be chosen in terms of views and impressions peculiar to the individual.

¹³ *Brihad Aranyaka Up.* III 9.

¹⁴ *Liber Positionum* is found translated at the end of the first volume of the translation of Eckhart's works in the edition of C. de B. Evans, pp. 445-83, see p. 482.

IX.

Conclusion

With what does the mystic achieve union? The names of the Reality vary, and the conceptions of the mystics are limited by knowledge and culture, but there seem to be three angles of approach:

1. Union with "God," a Divine Reality which is present everywhere and absent from nowhere—God who is an all-pervading, universal Being;
2. Union with a Being or a Beloved who is realized in the heart of man, personalized as an object of inward love and knowledge;
3. Union with a personage who is conceived as a Divine Protector of a race of people in the midst of which the mystic has been providentially placed—a Krishna, a Buddha, a Christ, or even a lesser figure.

The first of these types is philosophical and intuitive; the second might be said to belong to the seeker whose heart is awakened and in the ascendant; the distinguishing characteristic of the third is that it is a blend of a loving heart and a submissive will. But it is well to bear in mind that when all is said and done, these distinctions are probably artificial and sophisticated. As the Rhineland Master said, "In whatever way you find God best and are most aware of him, that way pursue."

1. It is one thing to arrive at the deduction that God is everywhere and in all things, as the philosopher does, by the manipulation of axiomatic truths; it is an altogether different thing to be able to experience the reality of God, as the mystic does, in the sense that he rises to an intuitive level where the certainty is as assured as is the light of day. "When love has carried us above all things . . . we receive in peace the Incomprehensible Light, enfolding us and penetrating us," says John of Ruysbroeck. "What is this Light if it be not the contemplation of the Infinite, and an intuition of Eternity? We behold that which we are, and we are that which we behold; because our being, . . . is united with the Divine Truth."¹ How to describe that union and identification? All words are inadequate. The Vedantin can only say, "Neti, Neti"—Not this, not that. Says the *Tao-Teh-King* (25):

One may think of it as the mother
of all things under heaven;
Its true name we do not know:
Tao is the by-name we give it.

But what cannot be known by name, can be known by inward identification and experience. It can be meditated upon until, like the angels, one becomes like unto them. In the mystical tradition, God cannot be known metaphysically and intellectually, as the philosophic mind seeks to know him, but he can be known in the only place where it is possible for man to know him: where he is one with man and man one with him.

¹ *The Sparkling Stone*, 43.

In the bold language of St. Catherine of Genoa: "My *me* is God, nor do I know my selfhood save in Him . . . My Being is God, not by simple participation, but by a true transformation of my Being."² It was by inward realization that this world-weary and disillusioned woman of twenty-seven came to know the secrets of the spiritual life. God is none other than the real Self of man: "the proper centre of everyone is God himself . . . The love of God is our true self-love, the love characteristic of and directed to our true selves, since these selves of ours were created by and for Love Itself . . . In truth, the divine precepts, although they are contrary to our sensuality, are nevertheless according to our spirit, which, of its very nature, is ever longing to be free from all bodily sensations, so as to be able to unite itself to God through love."³ It is true that many of the great mystics were also learned men and may thus have obtained the labels for their experiences from the study of the philosophical writers, such as Plotinus and Dionysius the Areopagite. What is then surprising is the language of this "Seraph of Genoa" (1447-1510), who was an unlearned woman, and merely a member of the Third Order of St. Francis. Her realization is comparable to the swift insight of Meister Eckhart: "When I stand empty in God's will and empty of God's will and of all His works and of God Himself, then am I above all creatures, and am neither God nor creature, but I am what I was and evermore shall be."⁴ "I saw no difference," says Mother Juliana of Norwich, "between God and our substance, but, as it were, all God . . . Highly ought we to enjoy that God dwelleth in our soul and much more highly, that our soul dwelleth in God."⁵

The oneness of the higher self of man in God and of God in the higher self of man may be traced in Western thought as far back as the Fourth Gospel, where the "I in them and thou in me that we may be one" is part of the prayer of Jesus. The mystic would add that it is part of the prayer of Jesus because it is the truth of life and existence; and that this is a truth which any may experience. In fact, in the Vedas and Upanishads, it is a vital truth which the teacher seeks to drive home analogically into the mind of his pupil. "That which is the subtle essence, this whole world has for its self. That is the true. That is the self. That art thou, Svetaketu."⁶ In the *Jabala Upanishad* we find the statement, "I am thou, O great God, and thou art I." In the Brahmana of the *Jaiminiya Upanishad*, we learn that when the deceased reaches the Sun-door, the question is asked, Who art thou? If he answers by a personal or family name, he is sent back and made subject once more to the law of Karma. If he answers, "Who I am is the light thou art. As such have I come to thee, the heavenly light," then Prajapati, "the Lord of Creatures" replies: "Who thou art the same am I; who I am the

² Quoted by Underhill, *Mysticism*, pp. 151, 153.

³ Quoted in D. S. H. S. Nicholson's *The Mysticism of St. Francis of Assisi*, London, 1923, pp. 320-21 n.

⁴ Eckhart, Sermon 87.

⁵ Inge, p. 206.

⁶ *Chandogya Upanishad*, VI. 8. 7, VI. 9. 4. etc.; also *Brihad Aranyaka Up.*; III.4.1.2.

same thou art. Enter in"⁷ The same idea is brought to us in the *Mathnawi* of the Sufi mystic, Jalal-udin-Rumi. A lover, says the story, knocked at the door of the Friend, and he was asked, "Who art thou?" "It is I," said the lover. "Begone," said the Friend. After a year's anguished separation the lover came and knocked again, and on being asked the same question replied, "It is Thou who art at the door, seeking Thyself." "Since thou art I, come in, O myself." (Bk. I, lines 3056-3065.) al-Hallaj, a Syrian Sufi who suffered martyrdom (922 A.D.) for revealing a knowledge he would have been wiser to have kept hidden, said boldly: "I am He whom I love and He whom I love is I . . . If ye do not recognize God, at least recognize His signs. I am that sign, I am the Creative Truth."⁸ He prayed for union with the Beloved as many another Bhakta has done, lamenting the illusion of separateness:

Betwixt me and Thee there lingers an "it is I" that torments me.

Ah, of Thy grace, take away this "I" from between us!

2. The immanence of God in all his creation is so often referred to in the writings of the great mystics, that all too many of them have been charged with being pantheists in the sense of being "nature mystics." This pantheism, though, is not nature worship, but the recognition that every living thing is a doorway to Divinity, and all things are by some secret magic so connected and intertwined that really to know and to love the creatures is to enter into the life of the Creator, and in that way, into one's Self. Unless it is understood that to enter into the creatures is to enter into God, the whole of the significance of God's message is missed, and the nature-mysticism with which certain individuals are charged might as well be nothing else than an attempt to communicate with earth spirits. But such is not the case. "If thou conceivest a small circle," says Jacob Boehme, "as small as a grain of mustard seed, yet the Heart of God is wholly and perfectly therein; and if thou art born in God, then there is in thyself (in the circle of thy life) the whole heart of God undivided."⁹ Boehme usually entered into this kind of "ecstasy" or deeper vision when his eyes fell on some bright object, as "burnished pewter." The contemplation of running water had the same effect on St. Ignatius de Loyola, who says, in his Testament, that sitting on the banks of a river one day, and facing the deep-running stream, "the eyes of his mind were opened, not so as to see any kind of vision, but so as to understand and comprehend spiritual things . . . with such clearness that all these things were made new." The contemplation of Nature, also, brought St. Teresa to see that it is a shrine of God. "I understood how our Lord was in all things, and how He was in the soul . . ." Meister Eckhart puts the matter with philosophical clearness: "God is nearer to me than I am to myself; He is just

⁷ See the commentary of Prof. Radhakrishnan in his translation of the *Ten Principal Upanishads*, N. Y. Harper's, 1953, p. 459.

⁸ Margaret Smith, *History of Mysticism*, p. 66.

⁹ Boehme, *The Threefold Life of Man*, ch. VI. 71.

as near to wood and stone, but they do not know it."¹⁰ This thought is a reminder of the sentence from the Egyptian Oxyrrhynchus Papyrus, in words ascribed to Jesus: "Raise the stone and there thou shalt find Me. Cleave the wood and there am I."

This "illuminated vision of the world" and of God in every animal-cule, is found in varied degrees in the mystical poets, but the doctrine of the Omnipresence of God in every moss and cobweb is found in its full perfection only in the illuminations of the greater mystics. In "Saul" (xvii) Browning makes David say:

I but open my eyes,—and perfection, no more and no less,
In the kind I imagined full-fronts me, and God is seen God
In the star, in the stone, in the flesh, in the soul and the clod.

In these illuminations, the whole universe is seen to be the face of God. For the Sufis, for example, every created thing was a reminder of God—the kind suggested by these verses of Baba Kuhi of Shiraz:

In the market, in the cloister,—only God I saw.
In the valley and on the mountain,—only God I saw.
Him have I seen oft beside me in tribulation;
In favour and fortune,—only God I saw.
In prayer and fasting, in praise and contemplation,
In the religion of the Prophet,—only God I saw.
.....
Like a candle I was melting in His fire.
Amidst the flames outflashing,—only God I saw.
Myself with mine own eyes I saw most clearly,
But when I looked with God's eyes,—only God I saw.
I passed into nothingness, I vanished,
And lo, I was the All-Living—only God I saw.¹¹

This same spirit—that the Real is everywhere and incarnated according to degree in each particular thing—is found in the teachings of the great Upanishads of India and the literature which breathes their knowledge and inspiration. God is seen in all Nature and worshipped in all Nature, but the heart that is purified comes to see and feel the Divine within its own self. There are these passages:

Salutations to the God who is in the fire, who is in the water,
who has pervaded the whole universe, who is in the plants and who
is in the trees. *Svetasvatara Up.* II.17

He who dwells in the earth, and is within the earth, whom the
earth does not know, whose body the earth is, and who controls the
earth from within—He is the Self, the controller within, the
immortal . . .

He who dwells in all beings, and is within all beings, whom all
beings do not know, whose body all beings are, and who controls
all beings from within—He is the Self, the controller within, the
immortal . . .

He who dwells in the mind and is within the mind, whom
the mind does not know, whose body the mind is, and who controls
the mind from within—He is the Self, the controller within, the
immortal. *Brihad Aranyaka Up.* III.vii. 3, 15, 20.

¹⁰ Underhill, *Mysticism*, p. 121.

¹¹ Quoted in Margaret Smith's *The Sufi Path of Love, An Anthology of Sufism*. London, Luzac and Co., 1954, p. 23.

The same kind of teaching, a discovery of the eternal in the temporal and the temporal in the eternal, is found in Mahayana Buddhism. The dwelling of the Buddha, we learn in the *Lotus of the Wonderful Law*, is "the great compassionate heart within all living things" (ch. x). The Buddha is seen in and through all things. "The Buddha sitteth on the Lion seat," says the *Avatamsaka Sutra*, "yet manifesteth himself in every particle of dust."¹²

3. In the various religions and by the individual mystics, the Divine is personalized in forms limited by the cultural traditions and by the particular experience of the religions. Among the Hindus, especially, devotional mysticism takes the form of the worship and experience of some aspect of the Trimurti, "the triple form" of reality. Professor Wilson explains the triad by saying that

Brahma is the embodiment of the *Rajo-Guna*, the quality of passion or desire, by which the world was called into being; Siva is the embodied *Tamo-guna*, the attribute of darkness or wrath, and the destructive fire by which the earth is annihilated; and Vishnu is the embodied *Satwa-guna*, or property of mercy and goodness by which the world is preserved. The three exist in one and one in three, as the Veda is divided into three and yet is but one, and they are all *Asrita*, or comprehended within that one being who is *Parama* or "supreme," *Guhya* or "secret," and *Sarvatma*, "the soul of all things."¹³

In India the worship of Brahma is almost extinct, but Shiva and Vishnu receive unbounded adoration from their respective followers; and each is elevated to the dignity of the supreme being. The name Siva is unknown to the Vedas, but Rudra, another designation for Siva, is very common and occurs both in the singular and the plural. He is lauded as the lord of songs, the lord of sacrifices, the healing god, brilliant as the sun, the lord of nourishment, one who drives away diseases, dispenses remedies and removes sin. He is also the wielder of the thunderbolt, the bearer of bow and arrows, the first divine physician, "blue-necked and red-colored, who has a thousand eyes and bears a thousand quivers." (Dowson, s.v.) In the Upanishads there are these allusions to him:

I alone was before all things and I exist and shall be. No other transcends me. I am eternal and not eternal, discernible and undiscernible, I am Brahma and I am not Brahma . . .

There is only one Rudra, there is no place for a second. He rules this fourth world, controlling and productive; living beings abide with him, united with him . . .

He is without beginning, middle or end; the one, the pervading, the spiritual and blessed, the wonderful, the consort of Uma, the supreme lord, the three-eyed, the blue-throated, the tranquil . . . He is Brahma, he is Siva, he is Indra; he is undecaying, supreme, self-resplendent; he is Vishnu, he is breath, he is the spirit, the supreme lord; he is all that hath been or shall be, eternal. Knowing him, a man overpasses death. There is no other way to liberation.¹⁴

¹² Kenneth Saunders, *The Gospel For Asia*, London, S. P. C. K., 1928, p. 204.

¹³ John Dowson, *A Classical Dictionary of Hindu Mythology*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 9th ed., 1957, s.v.

¹⁴ op. cit. p. 297.

In the *Ramayana*, Siva is personalized, is made a great god and an object of personal devotion. In the *Mahabharata*, Vishnu or Krishna is exalted and given the highest honor, but in many passages Siva occupies the supreme position, receiving the homage and worship of Vishnu and Krishna. In certain of the texts, conflicting claims are reconciled by making Siva and Vishnu, Siva and Krishna, to be one, or by saying, "there is no difference between Siva who exists in the form of Vishnu, and Vishnu, who exists in the form of Siva."¹⁵ Thus the Rudra of the Vedas has become the great and powerful god Siva, to his votaries the supreme God. He is possessed of endless powers and attributes, is represented under a variety of forms, and has a great number of names. One authority enumerates 1008 names, but many of these are descriptive epithets, such as "the three-eyed," and "the five-faced." He is commonly represented seated in profound thought, with a third eye in the middle of his forehead. This third eye is very destructive, and the gods and all created beings were destroyed by its glance at one of the periodical destructions of the universe. Siva is the great object of worship at Benares, under the name of Visweswara.

Though alluded to in the Vedas and the Brahmanas, Vishnu comes to prominence in the Puranas and the Mahabharata, where he is looked upon as the second member of the triad, the embodiment of the Satwaguna, the quality of mercy and goodness which displays itself as the preserving power, the self-existent and all-pervading spirit. The followers of Vishnu recognize in him the supreme being from whom all things emanate, and in the Puranas he is called Prajapati,—creator and supreme god. He is described in terms of three conditions: (1) as Brahma, the creator, who is represented as springing from a lotus which grew from Vishnu's navel while sleeping afloat upon the waters of the primordial deep; (2) as Vishnu, the preserver, incarnated as Krishna; and (3) as Siva or Rudra, the destructive power. The *Mahabharata* generally allows Vishnu supremacy, but at times Siva is represented as the greatest of the gods, and Vishnu pays him homage. The preserving and restoring power of Vishnu is manifest in the world primarily in terms of his Avatars or incarnations, in which a portion of himself is embodied in human form "for the destruction of the wicked and the salvation of the righteous." He, too, is accredited with a thousand names, the repetition of which is an act of devotion.

Dr. Coomaraswamy holds that "almost all Indian worship is monotheistic; there is not for the individual worshipper any confusion of God and gods." In the Bhagavad-Gita, especially, the end of life is seen to be union with the Divine in the form of Krishna. In recent times much of the devotional writing has been produced by Vaishnavas who worship Brahma in the "person" of Vishnu the Sustainer, the Benevolent, incarnated as Rama or Krishna. Shankaracharya sings:

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

May He, the all-pervading (Vishnu) protect this devotee who is an individual self existing in Himself, considering, "This devotee praises Me Who am the essence of all organs with constant devotion and single-mindedness and withdrawing within his own self"—that Hari, the destroyer of the darkness of *samsara*, I praise.

Hymn to Hari (Vishnu), 43

Many of the Hindu mystics have laid emphasis on the *bhakti* or devotional love for Vishnu in his human form. In fact, Indian systematizers have placed in categories the various shades of sentiment and emotion that *bhakti* assumes in the human worshipper, whether the object be Vishnu, Siva, or Kali. Thus,

Shanti bhava is the quietism of the devotee enjoying peace of mind in the contemplation of the divine favour of Hari. *Dasya* is the relation between a master and his servant in which the believer's energy and thought are dedicated in complete self-denial to the service of Hari. *Sakhyā* is a mode of friendship in which the devotee regards Krishna or Rama as his bosom friend and himself as the emanation of the Absolute. *Vatsalya* is the sentiment of tender affection which the devotee experiences in a father—or mother-child relationship with the object of his devotion in the form of the child Krishna or Rama. And finally, *madhurya bhava* is the emotion of passionate love, the culmination of the lover-beloved relationship of Hari and his devotee as exemplified in Shri Krishna...¹⁶

There are these verses from the religious poets of India:

The love of Hari is ineffable: I cannot find words to speak of the Absolute, the Unknowable, the Unmanifested. Only the devotee who enjoys the love of Hari knows how great is his supreme inner bliss: he is no more capable of describing that bliss than a dumb man is able to tell of the excellent flavour of the fruits he eats.
Sur Das (1483-1563)

Master, the rapture of a vision of thee has been mine;
Like pleasant arrows the gleams of thy glory have pierced through
my eyes, making me blind to everything save thee; thy presence
dwells in my breast, spreading the brightness of joy....
How can the bond between me and thee be severed?
As sap pervades the stem of a lotus, so is thy love immanent in me.
Mira Bai (b. 1516)

The *bhakti* element in Buddhism is generally obscured because the emotion is hidden in a word all too frequently translated as "faith" and carrying the narrow significance of that word (Pali *saddha*; Sanskrit, *śraddha*). "Faith" is made to be the first of the Five Powers listed in the *Samyutta Nikaya*, a treatise among the "Sermons," (V, 249) and it is a faith in the Buddha, a rapport or oneness with him, in the same sense as one finds the word used in the Gospel according to St. John. Bhikshu Sangharakshita, in his *Survey of Buddhism* (p. 310 ff) traces the word to its verb-connections, where it means "to place one's heart on," and holds that the connotation of "faith" is not mental, but definitely emotional. Faith, in the Buddhist sense, is definitely a "taking refuge" in the being who has attained Enlightenment and identifying oneself with him. The Element of Buddhahood "is nothing but the

¹⁶ John A. Ramsaran, "The Tradition of Bhakti Portry in Hindi", Hibbert Journal, April, 1959, p. 247.

reflection of the Absolute in the mirror of the so-called individual consciousness. Only because they are in possession of this reflected image do beings feel an affinity for Enlightenment.”¹⁷

Says the *Ratnagotravibhaga*:

If the element of the Buddha did not exist (in everyone),
There could be no disgust with suffering,
Nor could there be a wish for Nirvana,
Nor striving for it, nor a resolve to win it.¹⁸

We are told that even as there is a sympathetic vibration on another string when the string of a musical instrument is struck, so, too, when the devotee hears the music of Enlightenment, when he stands in the very presence of the Buddha, his Element of Buddhahood starts vibrating. Hence he knows that the great being before him is striking upon the strings of His own heart the mighty chord of Supreme Enlightenment. The Bhikshu points out that in the cadences of the *Sutta-Nipata* or “Collected Discourses” (1138-9, 1142-44, 1146-9) “faith” does not mean a feeble “confidence” or loyal acceptance of the truths preached by the Blessed One, but an ardent and powerful emotion, a “movement” impelling one toward the object of his love. It is this “faith,” in reality, an enlightened love purified by wisdom, that enables the pilgrim to cross to “the other shore.”

The idea of *bhakti*, says Har Dayal, was not a borrowed feather with which Buddhism adorned itself, but an integral part of Buddhist teaching from the earliest times. In fact, the very word, as “bhatti,” occurs first in the *Theragatha*, a Buddhist scripture. It is found in the ancient Pali *Nikayas*, and was called *saddha* in the fifth century B.C. “It is a great mistake to underestimate the importance of *saddha* in early Buddhism, which has been wrongly represented as a dry ‘rationalistic’ system of precepts and theories. Even in the Pali canon the impression left on the reader’s mind is that Gautama Buddha is the center of the whole movement, and that the Doctrine derives its vitality and importance from his personality.”¹⁹

Buddhism, as Christianity and Islam, has its heart-dedicated and mind-dedicated mystics. As Har Dayal protests, too many of us have become accustomed to thinking of Buddhism as a dry rationalistic system of ethics, and are not sufficiently well acquainted with its wealth of devotional or bhakti literature. A recent translation of *The Message of Milarepa*,²⁰ the “St. Francis of Tibet,” may help to bring to popular attention the existence of devotional literature in Mahayana Buddhism,—devotional hymns of which the Lord Buddha is the object of love and

¹⁷ Bhikshu Sangharakshita, *A Survey of Buddhism*, Indian Institute of World Culture, Bangalore, India, 1957, p. 303.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Har Dayal, *The Bodhisattva Doctrine in Buddhist Sanskrit Literature*, London, Kegan Paul, Trenchner, Trench and Co., Ltd. 1932, p. 32.

²⁰ *The Message of Milarepa*, New Light Upon the Tibetan Way, tr. by Sir Humphrey Clarke, London, John Murray, 1958.

adoration. *Saddha*, or "faith" in the dynamic and loving sense, we are told, is the first of twenty-five lofty spiritual qualities stressed in the *Abidhamma Pitaka* so much studied by members of the Southern school.²¹

In the Christian mystics, the Divine Reality is often personalized as the Master Christ. If one dared to put words in the mouths of some prominent Christian bhaktas, they might be made to say that the Divine is unrealizable and incapable of being known; Christ, though, may be loved and known, as the Divine made manifest. "Divine love," says Dionysius the Areopagite, "draws those whom it seizes beyond themselves; and this so greatly that they belong no longer to themselves but wholly to the Object loved."²² Mother Juliana of Norwich knows the Divine Reality as Christ-Jesus, in the sense of the creative Logos, of whom she can say, "For ere that He made us He loved us, and when we were made we loved Him." "I love thee and thou lovest me, and our love shall not be parted in two," says this Creative Spirit to her, and in this "showing" she is further told that "in falling and in rising we are ever precious kept in one Love . . . The beholding of our Lord God is the highest truth." There was joy in the Passion itself, and she heard Christ say, "If I might suffer more, I would suffer more." Yet, with Christ she sees this in right perspective: "The Passion was a noble, worshipful deed done in time, but Love was without beginning, is, and shall be without ending." So much is she filled with compassion "for the Passion of Christ" that she is also filled with compassion for all Christians.²³

Many of the Muslim mystics, as may be seen in the study of the Sufis, personalize this Divine Love as "The Beloved" and "The Friend." Of this there is no more classic an illustration than the cry of Rabia of Basra:

O my God! I invoke Thee in public as lords are invoked;
Publicly I say, "O my God," but privately I say,
"O my Beloved."²⁴

The bhaktas among the Sufis are always inclined to repudiate the knowledge of the head in favor of the certainty of the heart. Man loves, but his love is the answer to the eternal Lover Who is always seeking him. Says the Persian, Rumi:

No lover ever seeks union with his beloved,
But his beloved is also seeking union with him . . .
When the love of God arises in thy heart,
Without doubt God also feels love for thee.

²¹ *A Survey of Buddhism*, p. 311.

²² *On Divine Names*, IV. 13.

²³ *The Revelations of Divine Love*, recorded by Julian, anchoress at Norwich, A.D., 1373, edited by Grace Warrack, London, Methuen and Co., Ltd., 1901, 1952, pp. 127, 192, Ixxi, Ixxiv.

²⁴ Quoted in R. A. Nicholson, *The Mystics of Islam*, London, G. Bell and Sons, 1914, p. 8.

Appendix A

The Stages of the Spiritual Ascent From An Analysis of the *Emendatio Vitae* of Richard Rolle

Four main divisions of the book:

- A. Preparation for the Mystical Life (Chapters I, II, III)
- B. The Way of Purgation (Chapters IV, V, VI)
- C. The Way of Illumination (Chapters VII, VIII, IX)
- D. The Goal of Divine Union (Chapters X, XI, XII)

A. *Preparation for the Mystical Life*

1. *Conversion:*

Motives for Conversion: Suddenness of death.
Desire to love Christ truly.

Hindrances to Conversion: "The threefold cord"—
riches, flattery of women, beauty of youth.
Worldly occupations.

Fruits of Conversion: Glad suffering for Christ.
Forgetfulness of worldly affairs. Great temptations.

2. *Despising of the World:*

The lover of the world delights in

- a) Riches
- b) Dignity
- c) Wilfulness
- d) Power
- e) Honours

The lover of Christ will despise

- a) Lustiness of youth
- b) Riches
- c) Favours
- d) Beauty
- e) "All things that in this world pass away as a shadow."

Things that move a man to despise the world.

- a) The world itself—its evil and its pain.
- b) Changeableness of time.
- c) Shortness of life and certainty of death.
- d) Security of eternity.
- e) Emptiness of things present; truth of joys to come.

3. *Poverty*

Poverty includes (besides actual necessity)

- a) Change of thought and desire
- b) Singleness of aim
- c) Meekness of mind

B. *The Way of Purgation*

1. *The Right Ordering of Life*

A) Three things which defile a man

- (1) Evil thoughts
- (2) Uncontrolled words
- (3) Sinful actions

B) Three things which cleanse a man

- (1) Contrition of thought
- (2) Confession of mouth
- (3) Satisfaction of deed by—
 - (a) Fasting
 - (b) Prayer
 - (c) Almsgiving

C) Three things which make for cleanness of heart

- (1) Recollection of God
- (2) Guarding of outward senses
- (3) Honest occupation

D) Three things which preserve cleanness of word

- (1) Consideration in speech
- (2) Avoidance of much speaking
- (3) Hatred of lying

E) Three things which keep purity of work

- (1) Moderation in food and drink
- (2) Avoidance of evil company
- (3) Remembrance of death

F) Three things which lead to conformity with the Will of God

- (1) Example of creatures
- (2) Familiarity with God
- (3) The joy of Heaven

2. *Tribulation*

The Devil seeks to turn a man from God by temptations and tribulations which must be resisted by patience.

3. *Patience*

Tribulations are sent to withdraw us from love of the world, and are to be overcome by patient endurance.

Temptations are sent to bring us back from the love of God, and are to be overcome by faith, love and discipline.

C. *The Way of Illumination*

1. *Prayer*

Prayer leads a soul to:

- a) Love
- b) Peace
- c) Conquest of evil
- d) Sweetness
- e) Recollection of God

2. *Meditation*

Meditation upon the Passion and Death of Christ.

- a) Overcomes the devil
- b) Enflames the soul with the love of Christ
- c) Raises, cleanses and purifies the mind
- d) Acquaints the soul with the example of Jesus

Meditation:

- a) Differs in method for every soul
- b) Is the gift of God
- c) May be learnt from the examples of the saints

3. *Reading*

Bible Reading leads us to:

- a) Habits of holiness
- b) Overcoming sin
- c) Knowledge of God

D. *The Goal of Divine Union*1. *Purity of Heart*

Purity of heart is the fruit of a mind set upon God, and a spirit given to the exercises of the illuminative way. Its rewards are "song," "joy," and "love."

2. *The Love of God*

There are three degrees of Christ's love.

- a) Insuperable—when no other desire can overcome it
- b) Inseparable—when it cleaves to Christ with unswerving attention
- c) Singular—when nothing but Jesus can satisfy it

3. *Contemplation*, defined by Rolle as *jubilus divini amoris*—"The joyful song of the love of God."

The marks of a contemplative soul:

- a) Interior quiet
- b) Intense joy
- c) Love of solitude
- d) Interior longing for the love of Christ
- e) Change of outward life and habits leading to the accusation of lunacy

.... *The Amending of Life* by Richard Rolle, translated by Rev. H. L. Hubbard, London, John M. Watkins, 1922, pp. 33-38.

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